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NOTE

The footnote style of this work has been chosen with the necessities of fullness and simplicity as a primary consideration. In the first reference to a book, the footnote will carry the title, author, volume, page, etc., in full. Thereafter a reference to the same book will contain only the name of the writer, the page reference and, in some cases, an abbreviated title. Periodicals are referred to by date and second references to them by abbreviated titles and date. Ibidem is used only in a case where the same work and page (or issue of a periodical) is cited; otherwise, reference will be made only to the new page number or date.

Wherever possible, quotations from Fergusson's poems are taken from the earliest printed sources (usually the 1773 Poems or The Weekly Magazine), since no accurate reprint exists. In quoting manuscripts, no effort has been made to imitate the eighteenth century scribal habit of elevating the final letter of an abbreviated word (as M^r). Thorn for "th" is rendered by "y". Eighteenth century printers sometimes used small capitals in place of italics; in quotations here these have been reduced to regular lower case letters.

INTRODUCTION

I

The Poet and the City

Auld Reikie! thou'rt the canty hole,
 A bield for mony a caldrife soul,
 Wha snugly at thine ingle loll,
 Baith warm and couth;
 While round they gar the bicker roll
 To weet their mouth.

William Fergusson came to Edinburgh about the year 1747. What he saw in this ancient and regal city must have been no more than a number of harsh realities. Far too many inhabitants were confined within its tight walls and, even by eighteenth century standards, it was surprisingly filthy. It was a disheartening place for a stranger to earn an adequate living--indeed, the cost of living was as high for the thrifty townsmen of Edinburgh as for their more prosperous cousins in London. And William Fergusson had to find means to support his wife and three children who had remained in Tarland, awaiting the time when he would have sufficient money to send for them to join him.

William's life is largely hidden from us before his arrival in the city, but there are some fairly certain assumptions which can be made. He was born in Tarland, near Aberdeen, c. 1713 or earlier, and he had received a good education. After an

apprenticeship--perhaps to his father, Henry Fergus[s]on, who was a litster, or dyer of cloth--he married about the year 1740. During this time he had become responsible for the family business; this had failed, however, leaving him heavily in debt. Having lost all expectation of inheritance as a result of the failure, he saw no possibility of his remaining in the North which, besides suffering a natural poverty, was undergoing the added injuries of an English revenge for the rebellion of 1745 and, in certain regions, a complete change in social and economic structure. He turned then to the Capital, which was enjoying a limited prosperity as one of the financiers of the growing British Empire.

The queenly city was not to give William Fergusson a great deal. But a son, Robert, was born to him there and this son found his expression of life in the juxtapositioned filth and beauty of "Auld Reikie." "Auld Reikie"--so Edinburgh was called for the reek of smoke which shrouded her each evening as her burghers lit their fires.

* * *

Robert Fergusson was born in a squeezed-in blind alley called the Cap and Feather Close. From this confined place, from a strictly religious household, from sometimes tight financial circumstances, and from a body limited in its physical

energies, the soul of a poet could hardly have been expected to emerge. For that matter, Robert's family probably did not expect that his soul would remain long on earth at all. Because of ill health, his schooling was postponed until he reached six years of age, at which time he became a student at Mr. Philp's school in Niddry's Wynd. After the rudiments of learning had been attained, he was enrolled in the High School. There his scholarship was remarkably successful when one considers that his attendance was often interrupted by chronic illness. Possibly through an uncle's influence, he obtained a bursary to the Dundee Grammar School. This bursary eventually brought him to St. Andrews University, where he commenced studies for the ministry in the Church of Scotland. This he later abandoned.

Meanwhile William Fergusson was struggling to support his family. His first work in Edinburgh had been with Robert Baillie, a city magistrate who was engaged in the importing and exporting business. Baillie was ruined financially by a shipwreck in 1754 and Fergusson was forced to go elsewhere. He was successively employed as a clerk to a firm of upholsterers and to a solicitor, as an "accomptant" to French naval prisoners at Edinburgh Castle, and as a clerk in the British Linen Company's Bank. In May 1767 he died "of an asthma." Fortunately, Robert was able to complete his education; but it soon became his responsibility to provide for his mother who was to survive

her husband by twenty years. He was not inclined to this immediately; he was waiting, hoping for some favor from his uncle in the way of pleasant employment, or a sinecure which would give him leisure for his literary activities, for he had already set his mind on that achievement. Finding no patronage in that nepotistic age, the young poet was compelled to take work less to his liking, but work with the future possibility of a career in the law. In late 1770 he became a copyist in the Commissary Clerk's office.

Slowly--too slowly, for there was not much time left--Robert Fergusson began to savor his native city in artistic expression. The outcome was a small body of poetry in Scots, his mastery of which, in some respects, never has been surpassed. It was not, however, a sudden phoenix-like birth from nothing. He knew the dialects of Scotland intimately and he had long recognized what virile beauty could be generated from them. At one time he had hoped that English poetry would bring him the fame which he desired; it did not, for in English poetry, he had been working with a tradition which was sorely in need of a transfusion. But Scots poetry was a living tradition and it needed no transfusion; it only awaited the hand of a real poet. His poetry was published in The Weekly Magazine by his friend Walter Ruddiman. In late 1772 his volume of poems appeared. In October 1773 an elegy was published and, about the same time, a

topographical-descriptive poem, Auld Reikie, which he had started much earlier, was also printed. By October 1772, he had been acclaimed the laureate of the city. For the moment the success was staggering and the new laureate had epic plans for Scots poetry--he had commenced a translation of Virgil in Scots--but he was never to complete them.

While he displayed such precocity in his literary work, Fergusson's social accomplishments were no less impressive. He won many friends: artists, singers, musicians, actors, poets. He was a member of clubs; one of them was the Cape Club. His friends always found him jovial and, for the escape he found among them, he lived for a time, if not in dissipation, certainly in a reckless manner. One of his friends wanted to be no more than a friend: she was "Stella" (and perhaps also "Mary") who may have been the wife of a fellow Cape Club member, James Cummyng. Of all these friends, it is doubtful that many of them knew the profound and tortured mind of Robert Fergusson.

The seeds of madness had been with him all his life. He was afflicted with manic-depression, which manifested itself in feelings of doubt and betrayal of a religious nature, for his doubts had led him to turn against his father's wishes that he become a minister. There were long periods of despondency to balance his excessive cheer. The last days of recklessness were a weighty factor in bringing on his final mental and

physical collapse. And there is also a hint of disease, but this could have made no more than a psychological wound in his delicate nature. The overwhelming fact is that Fergusson had never possessed the stability of mind to withstand the forces of the environment around him. His poetry in 1773 prophesied the dissolution and he was compelled to leave his work some time in 1774. In his last year he made a futile attempt to restore himself. His productive period--which had lasted but two years--was at an end. Fits of violence occurred. A meeting in Haddington with the Reverend Doctor John Brown may have contributed to this state, but Fergusson would have arrived at it anyway. A fall down a stair in the autumn of 1774 with resultant traumatic shock certainly aggravated his already serious, but not quite hopeless, condition. His friends, by a pathetic ruse, conducted the insane poet to the local bedlam, an institution for paupers. Help was sent but, ironically enough, it was too late, for by the time it came Robert Fergusson had died alone in the night on the floor of his cell. He left in his poetry an echo of farewell and lament,

Reikie, farewell! I ne'er could part
Wi' thee, but wi' a dowy heart...

* * *

The personal appearance and manner of the poet is adequately described by his contemporaries:

In stature Fergusson was above five feet nine, slender and handsome. His face never exhibited the least trace of red, but was perfectly and uniformly pale, or rather yellow. He had all the appearance of a person in delicate health; and Mr S----- remembers that, at last, he could not eat raw oysters, but was compelled by the weakness of his stomach, to ask for them pickled. His forehead was elevated, and his whole countenance open and pleasing. He wore his own fair brown hair, with a long massive curl along each side of the head, and terminating in a queue, dressed with a black silk riband. His dress was never very good, but often much faded, and the white thread stockings, which he generally wore in preference to the more common kind of grey worsted, he often permitted to become considerably soiled before changing them. (Chambers, Robert, Lives of Illustrious and Distinguished Scotsmen, Glasgow 1832-1835, v. II, p. 304.)

Fergusson was in his person, rather slender; his countenance expressed the vivacity of penetrative genius, yet modesty was mingled in his glance. His manners were accommodated to the moment; he was gay, serious, set the table in a roar, charmed with his powers of song, or bore with becoming dignity his part in learned, or philosophical disquisition. In short, he had united in him the sprightliness and innocence of a child, with the knowledge of a profound and judicious thinker. (Campbell, Alexander, An Introduction to the History of Poetry in Scotland, Edinburgh 1798, p. 300.)

The personal appearance of Fergusson is described as interesting and genteel, although not peculiarly handsome... Like most men of sense, Fergusson despised the trappings of dress; and like many men of genius, he laughed at those who made the form of their habiliments [sic] an object of deep importance. ([Peterkin, Alexander], The Works of Robert Fergusson, London 1807, p. 73.)

As to his person, he was about the middle stature, and of a slender make. His countenance, which in other respects had a tendency toward effeminacy, was rendered highly animated by the expression of his large black eyes. His manner was genteel, and free from every species of affectation. (Irving, David, The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson, Glasgow 1800, p. 18.)

He was in person about five feet, six inches high, and well shaped. His complexion fair, but rather pale. His eyes full, black, and piercing. His nose long, his lips thin, his teeth well set and white. His neck long, and well proportioned. His

shoulders narrow, and his limbs long, but more sinewy than fleshy. His voice, strong, clear, and melodious. Remarkably fond of old Scots songs, and the best singer of the birks of Invermay I ever heard. When speaking, he was quick, forcible, and complaisant. In walking, he appeared smart, erect, and unaffected. (Sommers, Thomas, The Life of Robert Fergusson, Edinburgh 1803, p. 45.)

According to another individual who recollects seeing him, "he was very smally and delicate, a little in-kneed, and waigled a good deal in walking." (Chambers, p. 311.)

...he preserved a modesty and gentleness of manners, exhibited by few of his age, sprightly humour, and unpatronized situation. (Sommers, p. 40.)

When seated with some select companions over a friendly bowl, his wit flashed like lightening, struck the hearers irresistibly, and set the table in a roar. (Ruddiman, Thomas, as in Dickens, Bruce, ed., Scots Poems by Robert Fergusson, Edinburgh 1925, p. viii.)

To all of this Robert Fergusson would add:

You've seen me round the bickers reel
Wi' heart as hale as temper'd steel,
And face sae apen, free and blyth,
Nor thought that sorrow there cou'd kyth;
But the niest mament this was lost,
Like gowan in December's frost.

You have seen the famous street of To My Auld Breeks, leading to the port of Tournay, which is said to be the finest in Europe; but which I can assure you is not to be compared either in length or breadth to the High Street at Edinburgh; and would they be at the expense of removing some buildings which obstruct the view, by being placed in the middle of the street, nothing could be conceived more magnificent. Now Robert Fergusson's Edinburgh is best depicted by those who held, in their youth, nearly the whole length of it, and knew it.

The situation of Edinburgh is probably as extraordinary an one as can well be imagined for a metropolis. The immense hills, on which great part of it is built, tho' they make the views uncommonly magnificent, not only in many places render

it impassible for carriages, but very fatiguing for walking. The principal or great street runs along the ridge of a very high hill, which, taking its rise from the palace of Holyrood House, ascends, and not very gradually, for the length of a mile and a quarter, and after opening a spacious area, terminates in the castle. [Until 1784, the High Street had a much steeper incline than it has today.] On one side, far as the eye can reach, you view the sea, the port of Leith, its harbour and various vessels, the river of Firth, the immense hills around, some of which ascend above even the Castle; and on the other side you look over a rich and cultivated country, terminated by the dark, abrupt, and barren hills of the Highlands. ([Topham, Edward], Letters from Edinburgh, London 1776, p. 8.)

At the extremity of the east end of the city stands the palace of Holy-rood-house; leaving which, a little to the left, you come through a small suburb to the entrance, called the Water-port. From hence, turning west, the street goes on, in a strait [*sic*] line, through the whole city, to the castle. It is above a mile in length; and is, perhaps, the largest, longest, and finest street, for buildings, and number of inhabitants, in the world.

From the palace-door, which stands on a level with the lowest of the plain country, the street begins to ascend very gradually, being no where steep; but this ascent being continued for so long a way, it is easy to imagine, that the farther part must necessarily be very high; for the castle...makes, on all three sides...a very steep and frightful precipice. ([Anonymous], Curiosities of Great Britain, [n.p., n.d.], v. V, p. 317.)

You have seen the famous street of Lisle, la Rue royale, leading to the port of Tournay, which is said to be the finest in Europe; but which I can assure you is not to be compared either in length or breadth to the High Street at Edinburgh: and would they be at the expence of removing some buildings which obstruct the view, by being placed in the middle of the street, nothing could be conceived more magnificent. Not content, however, with this, they suffer a weekly market to be held, in which stalls are erected nearly the whole length of it, and make a confusion almost impossible to be conceived. All sorts of iron and copper ware are exposed for sale; here likewise the herb market is held, and the herb women, who are in no country either the most peaceable or the most cleanly beings upon earth, throw about the roots, stalks, &c. of the bad vegetables, to the great nuisance [*sic*] of the passengers.

The style of building here is much like the French: the houses, however, in general are higher, as some rise to twelve,

and one in particular to thirteen stories in heighth. But to the front of the street nine or ten stories is the common run; it is the back part of the edifice which, by being built on the slope of an hill, sinks to the amazing depth so as to form the above number. This mode of dwelling, tho' very proper to the turbulent times to which it was adapted, has now lost its convenience: as they no longer stand in need of the defence from the castle, they no more find the benefit of being crowded together so near it. The common staircase which leads to the apartments of the different inhabitants, must always be dirty, and is in general very dark and narrow. It has this advantage, however, that as they are all of stone, they have little to apprehend from fire, which, in the opinion of some, would not more than compensate for every other disadvantage. In general, however, the highest and lowest tenements are possessed by the artificers, while the gentry and better sort of people dwell in the fifth and sixth stories. (Topham, Letters, pp. 8-10.)

The original town has been fortified, is surrounded by a wall, and has nine ports. The buildings are all of them of stone of a brown cast, and those in the high street extremely elevated... These buildings are divided by extremely thick partition walls, into large houses which are called lands, and each story of a land is called a house...As each house is occupied by a family, a land, being so large, contains many families; that I make no manner of doubt but that the High street in Edinburgh is inhabited by a greater number of persons than any street in Europe. The ground floors and cellars are in general made use of for shops by the tradesmen; who here style themselves Merchants, as in France...The merchants...have the horrid custom of painting on the outside of their houses, the figure of the commodity which is to be sold within; which, in this place, makes the oddest appearance you can conceive; for each story, perhaps, from top to bottom, is chequered with ten thousand different forms and colours; that the whole resembles the stall of a fair... (Topham, Letters, pp. 27, 28.)

The great Number of Streets, Squares, Courts, Wynds, Closes, and Rows...to be in a place of so small Dimensions as Edinburgh is, will, no doubt, surprise the Citizens themselves; wherefore, it is necessary to observe, that there is seldom more than one Row of Buildings between two Closes, and those so very high and crowded with People, that the great Number of Inhabitants of this City will...appear to be as amazing as the said great Number of Streets, Squares, &c. wherein are contained nine thousand and sixty four Houses. [There was a total of 329 Streets, Closes, Wynds, etc., at the time the above was written.] (Maitland, William, The History of Edinburgh, Edinburgh MDCCLIII, p. 217.)

The city, till within these few years, has occupied the same space of ground upwards of two hundred and fifty years... In a description of the chief cities of the world, given about the middle of the sixteenth century, Edinburgh is said to be an Italian mile in length, and a half mile in breadth, which corresponds to the limits we have just described [as existing in 1779]. (Arnot, Hugo, The History of Edinburgh, Edinburgh 1779, p. 239.)

The population of Edinburgh, which was pressed into this surprisingly small area, was about 70,000 in the middle of the century and in 1779 Arnot estimated that it stood at 82,230.¹

"...it is one of the most populous places of its size in the known world..."²

From the left of the High-street you pass down by a number of different...Wynds and Closes, to the different parts of the old town. They are many of them so very steep, that it requires great attention to the feet to prevent falling; but so well accustomed are the Scotch to that position of body required in descending these declivities, that I have seen a Scotch girl run down them with great swiftness in pattens.

The town has long been reproached with many uncleanly customs. A gentleman, who lately published his travels through Spain, says, "that Madrid, some years ago, might have vied with Edinburgh in filthiness." It may probably be some pleasure to this author, and to those who read him, to learn that his remarks are now very erroneous.

But if a stranger may be allowed to complain, it would be, that in these wynds, which are very numerous, the dirt is suffered to remain two or three days without removal, and becomes offensive to more senses than one. The magistrates, by imposing fines and other punishments, have long put a stop to the throwing any thing from the windows into the open street: but as these allies [sic] are unlighted, narrow, and removed from public view, they still continue these practices with impunity. Many an

continued until the middle of the nineteenth century when there

1. Arnot, p. 339. disposal methods and fetid waters lay

2. Topham, p. 32.

3. The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 24 January 1761.

4. 27 January 1770.

elegant suit of clothes has been spoiled; many a powdered, well dressed macaroni [sic] sent home for the evening: and to conclude this period in Dr. Johnson's own simple words, "Many a full flowing perriwig [sic] moistened into flaccidity." (Topham, Letters, pp. 14, 15.)

That uncleanliness was a problem of the most importunate nature. The crowding of the citizens into so small an area--part of the cause of it--was relieved with the building of the New Town on the flat land below. Provost Drummond authorized the draining of the North Loch, just below the Castle and the High Street, in 1758. The North Bridge was completed in the early 1770's so that expansion of the city was facilitated, even though most of the poorer people remained in the unsanitary confines of the Old Town. But the problem of filth persisted. In January 1761 a woman servant was arrested and incarcerated "for 24 hours in the Tolbooth, and fined in the penalty of ten shillings" for "that abominable practice of throwing over nastiness."³ That was not an adequately successful method, however, of dispelling a tradition which had almost gained a dignity. A court was set up especially to deal with that particular offense and "the new Regulations" were to be given effect "on the first Monday of February [1770]."⁴ Nevertheless the general unsanitary condition continued until the middle of the nineteenth century when there were still no proper disposal methods and fetid waters lay

3. The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 24 January 1761.

4. 27 January 1770.

5. Anonymous, A Monster Grown at Some Black Spots on the Face, Body, and Extremities of Auld Reekie (Edinburgh 1852).

stagnant everywhere around the city.⁵

But disadvantages such as overcrowding and lack of sanitation did not disturb the robust life of eighteenth century Edinburgh. There might even have been a philosophical compensation in those conditions:

They kindly shower Edina's roses,
To quicken and regale our noses.
Now some for this, wi' satire's leesh,
Ha'e gi'en auld Edinburgh a creesh:
But without souring nocht is sweet;
The morning smells that hail our street,
Prepare, and gently lead the way
To simmer canty, braw and gay...

Auld Reikie

Beyond such amiable excuses were other redeeming factors. Edinburgh had, for instance, a community spirit which her citizens probably retained as a result of their physical closeness. If an escape from this physical closeness were necessary, the open fields, the hills, the greenness, lay close at hand. But most important, the intellectual life, though perhaps a little stilted and lofty, was nevertheless alive as at no other time in the city's history, and everyone was in a position to feel it, to watch or to nourish its growth. By the end of the century this new Athens seemed to have cornered the market on all profound philosophy. And no provincial city could offer quite so much wealth for the rise of a young poet who had perception enough to use its riches.

5. [Anonymous], A Monster Growl at Some Black Spots on the Face, Body, and Extremities of Auld Reekie (Edinburgh 1854).

II

The Biographies

Literary historians have been pointing out that Robert Fergusson is a neglected poet. If they were to count the editions of his work and the volumes which contain biographies, long and short, by the time the count of fifty or sixty had been reached, they would realize that there has been no such thing as neglect in point of popularity. Perhaps no minor poet of the eighteenth century has been so popular. Surely figures such as Smart, Anstey--even Swift, as a poet--have suffered more neglect than has Robert Fergusson. If a poet is to be valued for his work, then he probably has achieved that which he desired to achieve. But if a poet is to be valued also as a man--and sharp, gentle, tragic Robert Fergusson should be valued as a man--a real neglect can be uncovered. There has been one full length biography. There have been only two or three appreciably correct and enlightened biographies. It is time for another.

Thomas Ruddiman, the son of Fergusson's publisher, Walter Ruddiman, was responsible for the first biographical notice of the poet (The Works of Robert Fergusson, Part II, Edinburgh 1779).⁶ His two-page, faulty, but sincere tribute served its

6. This is essentially the same as Fergusson's obituaries in The Weekly Magazine of 20 October 1774 and in The Caledonian Mercury of 22 October 1774.

purpose as an introduction to the poetry while still not attempting to be a work of reference. This life, with its unfortunate errors (such as the misdating of the poet's birth), was reprinted many times in subsequent editions of the poems either in its original or in a supplemented form. Ruddiman's material descriptive of the poet's character has been used by all of the biographers with or without acknowledgment.

Ruddiman's brief account was followed by one even more brief in John Pinkerton's Ancient Scottish Poems never before in Print (London 1786, pp. cl, cli). Consisting of approximately a page of material supplied to Pinkerton by a friend of Fergusson, undoubtedly George Paton, Fergusson is portrayed as dissipated and his poetry is dismissed lightly. Pinkerton also presented a significant description of the poet's being conveyed to the Edinburgh bedlam. By this time, the tradition of the poet's dissipation, founded or unfounded, had been firmly developed.

Alexander Campbell undertook conscientious research for the biography in his Introduction to the History of Poetry in Scotland (Edinburgh 1798). It is a biography which has always been placed to one side rather too lightly. Since no adequate life had appeared, Campbell, long interested in the poet, determined to accomplish the task. This he did diligently, perusing, presumably, the newspapers of Fergusson's time, the two past "biographies," local records, and interviewing the

poet's sister and friends. Certainly his work contained errors; James Inverarity maintained the errors were due to Campbell's trusting many pieces of information to his memory, but this can hardly have been the case. As will be seen later, the very errors which Campbell made prove his diligence and the extent of his research. A substantial section of the biography is based upon testimony of the Fergusson family as well as upon documents which were in their possession. An account of the poet's father is presented; an anecdote of interest is related. And he gives us the story of Fergusson's madness having been precipitated by a soul-shaking conversation with the Reverend Doctor John Brown in a Haddington churchyard. Campbell's is the first life of Fergusson which can be described as more than a comment.

Bishop George Gleig's entry in his Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Edinburgh 1801) was based upon Ruddiman's and Campbell's work as well as "a manuscript account... with which we have been favoured by a relation." The "relation" is taken to have been James Inverarity--some even say that he wrote the account--but Gleig, usually very careful in attributions, does not credit him; it hardly appears that Inverarity exerted much influence on this version of his uncle's life. The pernicious fault in Gleig's biography is that it tends to intensify the tradition of dissipation. Indeed, hardly

any subsequent biography denies this aspect of Fergusson's personality. Neither Gleig nor David Irving, whose life (The Life of Robert Fergusson, Glasgow 1800) appeared at approximately the same time as Gleig's, can be fully blamed for their allegations. These allegations came largely from Fergusson's own family, and had Irving not written his biography, many important facts of Fergusson's life would have been lost or mislaid. We are indebted to Irving for the story of Fergusson's visit to his uncle's house in Round Lichnot and his subsequent dismissal from there. Irving's life was more detailed than the previous ones had been, and he made a genuine, if misleading, attempt to search out the poet's character. The first person to object to this biography was James Inverarity, Fergusson's nephew. Although his knowledge probably did not extend beyond untrustworthy family traditions, he sought to refute Irving's harsher statements in The Scots Magazine of October and November 1801 ("Strictures on Irving's Life of Fergusson"). In this attempt he failed utterly; he merely put forward weak excuses for the dissipation. Thus an even blacker character portrayal developed when the poet's own nephew was unable to defend him. We must be grateful to Inverarity, however, for he gave us a few more fragments of material. An anonymous biography prefacing the 1807 edition of Fergusson's works is generally accepted as having been written

It was Thomas Sommers (The Life of Robert Fergusson, Edinburgh 1803) who fancied himself the real defender of Fergusson, but his defense is lost in that he seems barely to have known him. He claimed that he had known the poet since he himself was twelve years of age and Fergusson six. That is an unlikely friendship. When Sommers refutes the stories of Campbell and Irving, he is unconvincing because he takes a great deal of his material--material a friend should have known intimately--from their very pages. Unable to sketch the poet's character himself, he found it necessary to use Ruddiman's exposition; and it was Pinkerton's account of Fergusson's being conveyed to the asylum which he appropriated. He maintained (as did Irving) that the Haddington meeting with Dr. Brown did not occur in late 1774, but it is almost certain that he did not see the poet very much at all after the middle of that year. He presents several weak stories about Fergusson, and an important anecdote which he misdates. It is obvious that he hardly appreciates the work of the man whom he calls his "favourite poet." Some statements come forth to lighten the burden of the accusations of an indiscreet life, but can we trust such a man? Perhaps we should be ready to forgive Sommers since he wrote so many years after the poet's death.

An anonymous biography prefacing the 1807 edition of Fergusson's works is generally accepted as having been written

by Alexander Peterkin. Two letters (at Edinburgh University) addressed to Peterkin by James Grahame, to whom the volume was dedicated, put this attribution beyond all doubt. Peterkin desired to do two things: to give the truth and to set it forth fairly. He was living at a time when it was still possible to contact persons who had known Fergusson;⁷ one of these whom he consulted was undoubtedly James Grahame and another was Fergusson's sister Margaret. The biographer evaluated the character of Fergusson with extreme severity, so extreme that Grahame objected to some parts of the life and feared lest people should accuse him of having written the biography and having written it unjustly. Peterkin may have been overanxious to point out the truth, enough so that he hurt his own reputation, but his sincere purpose has been abused too greatly. Gleig, Irving, Peterkin--all owe their eventual damnation as infamous biographers to Grosart's assault upon them. But Grosart attacked without an appreciation of their position, for they all admitted that they had been dependent upon the testimony of others who had claimed knowledge of Fergusson. It was Sommers and Inverarity who, while assuming

7. Peterkin, p. 71: "I am authourised, by...different individuals who knew Fergusson, to contradict the assertions of Mr Irving, who knew him not."

the air of authority, clearly passed on dangerous basic untruths about Fergusson.

In his Lives of Illustrious and Distinguished Scotsmen (Glasgow 1832-1835), Robert Chambers included yet another careless biography of Fergusson. A "Mr S[pence?]," as well as the Fergusson family, had given him new material.

Alexander Balloch Grosart, however often he is misdirected in his appreciations, wrote what has been, until recently, the best biography. Born at Stirling in 1827, Grosart was still under twenty when he first entered upon his study of Scottish poetry in general and of Robert Fergusson in particular. From the year 1844 he had been collecting materials for a biography and a definitive edition of the poetry. He contacted such bibliophiles as Alexander Gardyne (whose bibliographical manuscripts are at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow) and David Laing, the Director of the Signet Library in Edinburgh. With the latter he had a correspondence which, covering a number of years, comprised seventy-five letters on his own part, many having to do with Fergusson materials.⁸ He borrowed books and

manuscripts from Laing and others. The librarian also supplied him with information he was able to obtain from persons of his acquaintance. The extent of David Laing's help is hard to

8. Grosart-Laing Correspondence, Edinburgh University.

ascertain, but his contributions must certainly have been a large factor in causing young Grosart's unformed literary dreams to assume their substantial result, The Works of Robert Fergusson by "A. B. G.," in 1851. Gilbert Goudie, in his biography of David Laing, has described Grosart's first letters to Laing as "pathetic," but the outcome of them did not prove at all pathetic for a very young man. The life was accepted as the final authority for nearly fifty years and was superseded only by another biography by Grosart (Robert Fergusson, Edinburgh 1898).

It was Alexander Law who, in a bibliographical essay (Smith, Sydney Goodsir, ed., Robert Fergusson 1750-74, Edinburgh 1951), made the very significant challenge: Where are Grosart's manuscripts?⁹ Grosart had not documented his work thoroughly; he claimed to have owned and used certain books and manuscripts which we now know he did not own or use. If a student is to trust Grosart, he must seek out the manuscripts once more or, if they are not available, at least attempt to substantiate them; he must correct numerous misconceptions and misquotations from printed materials. For an age of perhaps over-meticulous,

9. In The Catalogue of the Barnbogle Castle Library [belonging to the late Lord Rosebery] (Edinburgh 1885) are listed two notebooks which had belonged to Grosart and which he used in writing his biography. I have attempted to locate them, but without success. Presumably they still remain in the Barnbogle Library.

scientific and skeptical scholarship, Grosart will no longer do. And aside from factual materials, there is yet another objection. In common with many scholars of his century, Grosart was a romantic, and his interpretation of Fergusson's character often ignored the facts. He had created a young man too free from the sins of his age. Though he had vowed to Laing, "I have such a respect, nay veneration for the good old doctor [Irving], that I would rather do anything than offend him,"¹ he nevertheless condemned in the strongest terms Irving's rather truer--though too harsh--picture of Fergusson's character and substituted a whiter, more sentimental picture in its stead. To do this, he actually suppressed materials--such as the Cape Song, which "could not bear the light at all, at all."²

Succeeding studies failed to remedy the shortcomings of Grosart, for they accepted Grosart without much question. John A. Fairley contributed a bibliography indispensable to the student (A Bibliography of Robert Fergusson, Glasgow Bibliographical Society, 1915). William Roughhead, using information derived from Grosart and from his personal contact with Fairley, lent the hand of a skillful writer to a short account ("A Note on Robert Fergusson," The Juridical Review, v. 30, 1918). Sydney

1. Grosart-Laing Correspondence.

2. Ibid.

Goodsir Smith prefaced a bicentenary volume of essays (mentioned above) with an even better written biography, unfortunately too brief; Alexander Law's excellent contribution to that volume has already been noted.

Though it is very short--only seventy-nine pages in length--Matthew P. McDiarmid's recent biography (The Poems of Robert Fergusson, Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh 1954, v. I) has added new information to the total study. It has put many of Grosart's romantic assumptions and evasions in a proper light. But it is not without errors, major and minor. Its documentation is weak and, while it can be of undisputed value to a scholar, only a minority of materials from manuscript and printed sources are correctly quoted. Thus it cannot be relied upon for detailed fact.

The reason for another biography of Fergusson is easily found. The justification for this one does not lie solely in its new facts and corrections, but more in the matter of scope and a restrained evaluation of materials. Here will be space enough for all of the facts and variant judgments. To my mind, there has been no adequate biography, and it is my hope that this one will do honest justice to the memory and to the literary genius of Robert Fergusson.

But the biographer must admit that any account of Fergusson will lack warmth. In the absence of the intimate materials

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which enliven a biography--such as personal letters--it is

impossible to do much more than to make an accurate and full

reference work. We must try to find the real Robert Fergusson

in the creative legacy which he himself left to us.

While this preliminary survey will be a brief attempt to
unify the total information available, further commentary will
have its place in later parts of this work.

Alexander Runciman met Fergusson in mid-1772 through the
office of Thomas Smeaton, who had recommended the poet as a
model for Runciman's projected series of paintings illustrating
the story of the Prodigal Son. There are two of these pieces
known today: one is located in the Church of St. Patrick in
Edinburgh and the other is in the possession of the Honorable
Edward Runciman of Oxford. Fergusson was painted into at least
one of the scenes, but in neither of the extant paintings does
the figure resemble Fergusson or the Prodigal, if we may rely upon
contemporary description for the one and upon imagination for
the other. The person depicted is a robust young man, chiefly
distinguished for his muscular, untanned, and insensitive
appearance. Although no other portrait of the poet survives
this one, Smeaton maintained it was the best likeness he had
seen. On his testimony a portrait from the Prodigal Son series
was engraved for the 1821 edition of Fergusson's works, the

III

preface of which gives the following account of it:

The Portraits of Fergusson

The picture, of which Mr Sommers... gives so curious an account, has disappeared [i.e., the Prodigal among the swine]; and the interesting engraving that is prefixed to the present volume, is taken from a painting of the same subject.

The portraits of Robert Fergusson involve detailed study. While this preliminary survey will be a brief attempt to unify the total information available, further commentary will have its place in later parts of this work.

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preface of which gives the following account of it:

The picture, of which Mr Sommers...gives so curious an account, has disappeared [i.e., the Prodigal among the swine]; and the interesting engraving that is prefixed to the present volume, is taken from a painting by the same artist, in which the return of the Prodigal is represented; and there is every reason to believe that the portrait of Fergusson was faithfully copied by Runciman from the former picture. This is now in the possession of David Steuart, Esq. of the Customs, Edinburgh: Of this picture Mr Steuart gives the following account.

"It is five feet five inches broad, by three feet eleven inches high; and was purchased by me in the year 1793, at the sale of the collection of medals, coins, and other articles belonging to the late Mr [James] Cumming, secretary to the Antiquarian Society...the Picture was originally intended to be placed in the English Chapel [now St. Patrick's]...The subject seems to have been a favourite one with him, for, besides the drawing in my possession, he executed four, if not five, paintings of it, all differing from each other. The one in my possession is dated 1774...

"...Mr Inverarity, his nephew, has a lock of the Poet's hair, exactly of the same colour as that in the painting--and a considerable resemblance is apparent between the nephew and the portrait of the Poet himself."

The five paintings, "all differing from each other," can be taken to mean the series, each one of which represented another part of the story. The specific painting of the series from which the engraving was taken was that one which is presently

in the possession of Lord Runciman. Besides the engraving which appeared in the 1821 edition, another impression from the same plate was sold separately. A unique example of this is in the

3. Gray, James, ed., The Poems of Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1821), p. iv-vi.

5. Kay, John, A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature Sketches (Edinburgh 1835), v. II, p. 239.

thin, nosebone person, seated and holding a book. The nose is
Edinburgh Room of the Edinburgh Public Library.⁴
long and the chin heavy: these facial features are important

There was one authoritative dissent to Sommers' opinion of
because they are nearly always present in the contemporary
this portrait. In John Kay's Portraits, there is the following
"approved" portraits of Fergusson. This sketch is far below the
footnote:

quality of Runciman's other club petition drawings and reminds
The engraving [of the Prodigal] was shown to the late
Robert Pitcairn, Esq. Keeper of the Register of Probative Writs,
who was well acquainted with Fergusson, but he could trace no
resemblance to the Poet.⁵ The first reproduction having been

We can now depart from discussion of this portrait of Fergusson
and consider another, also said to have been drawn by Runciman.
It was the practice of the Cape Club to dub each member with
a facetious title of knighthood: Sir Toe, Sir Cape, etc., and
on the back of each Cape Club membership petition a club artist,
or artists, were wont to sketch something illustrative of the
knight's title. Usually Runciman is credited with the sketches,
although another artist, James Cummyng, was also a member of the
club. The masterful work of Runciman seems most prevalent. On
the back of Fergusson's petition is a line drawing of a long,

- another consulted Runciman about other materials (biographical)
4. David Laing notes the existence of this and he also notes
what was perhaps the original in "Mr. Stuart's possession."
Laing had a correspondence with Grosart, and Grosart
requested a portrait of Fergusson for a magazine he was
projecting. The portrait was supposedly prepared. Could
this print be the same one? Opposed to this conjecture
is Grosart's statement concerning this portrait in
The Works of Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1851), p. xiv:
"I purchased the plate from the proprietor, that no more
impressions might be issued."
 5. Kay, John, A Series of Original Portraits and Caricature
Etchings (Edinburgh 1838), v. II, p. 239.

thin, woebegone person, seated and holding a book. The nose is long and the chin heavy: these facial features are important because they are nearly always present in the contemporarily "approved" portraits of Fergusson. This sketch is far below the quality of Runciman's other club petition drawings and reminds one more of sketches by James Cummyng.⁶ This "portrait" has been reproduced a number of times, the first reproduction having been a facsimile published in 1823.⁷

The first published portrait, still different from those already mentioned, is of a very controversial nature. It appeared in the first issue of the 1782 edition of the works (August 1781) but was subsequently cancelled in the second issue of the same edition by the publisher, Thomas Ruddiman. John A. Fairley suggested that the cancellation was made because the portrait was a caricature and Fergusson's family objected to it.⁸ This seems logical, for the engraving is a rather horrid, pig-like production, and we have reason to believe that Fergusson's mother consulted Ruddiman about other materials (biographical) in the 1782 volume.⁹ While it may be a caricature, the

6. Examples of these are among the Cumming [sic] MSS. at Edinburgh University.

7. Fairley, John A., Robert Fergusson, The Published Portraits (Aberdeen 1932), p. 7. A copy of this facsimile is bound in a volume of the 1773 poems at Edinburgh University.

8. Fairley, pp. 4, 5.

9. Grosart, Works, p. xxvi.

portrait contains certain features which have been previously noted, namely a long nose and a heavy chin. Besides these, it depicts the poet as having large eyes and white hair, and the latter characteristic is attested in the 1805 edition of his works: "His hair was almost pure white."¹

It is possibly yet another portrait to which Fergusson refers in the Codicile to his poetical will:

To Walter Ruddiman, whose pen
Still screen'd me from the Dunce's Den,
I leave of phiz a picture, saving
To him the freedom of engraving
Therefrom a copy to embellish,
And give his work a smarter relish...

It may have been this particular one which Thomas Ruddiman requested of James Cummyng:

Tho. Ruddiman's Compliments to Mr Cummyng. Begs he would look among his Papers for a Quarto Book of Drawings which T. R. left with Mr C. some months ago.--It contains a sketch of the likeness of R. Fergusson, whose works T. R. has nearly ready for Publication and wishes to have his head engraved with all speed--If Mr C. will leave the Book with his Son, T. R. will send for it this afternoon.

Tuesday--

7 May 1782 [this last in Cummyng's hand]²

In another letter, dated a week later, Thomas Ruddiman again urged Cummyng with the words, "The want of Ferguson's Head is an infinite Loss to us at present.--"³ Obviously Cummyng was not

1. The Works of Robert Fergusson (W. & J. Deas, [Edinburgh] 1805), p. ix.
2. Edinburgh University MS. La. II 334/3.
3. Ibid.

The "miserable copy" may have been any one of the imitations of sufficiently jarred to send it along in time for inclusion in the second issue of the 1782 edition, and the portrait is not now traceable.

The caricature portrait of the 1782 edition was re-engraved for later editions of the poetry, probably from printed copies rather than the original. The more ridiculous elements were refined, but it did not necessarily take on a better appearance. It was used for the editions of 1788 and 1800; and finally Grosart found a "private copper-plate" of it⁴ in the hands of the Ruddiman family, had that re-engraved, and placed it in each of his four editions. Grosart's "private copper-plate" must have been the one used for the 1782 edition, though he could not recognize this because he had not seen a copy of that volume with a portrait. Grosart wrote to Laing on the matter of portraits and Laing was able to give substantiation for the copperplate.

Robert Fergusson the Poet [Laing's hand]

Mem. Mr. Spence thought the portrait with the pen in hand the best likeness, but allowed every one of the rest, except the miserable copy of the above, to be more or less like also.

With Mr Chambers' compts.⁵

4. Grosart, Works, p. xi.

5. Edinburgh University MS. La. II 334/5.

7. Grosart, Works, p. xii.

8. p. xi.

The "miserable copy" may have been any one of the imitations of the original, but it was probably that of the Morison edition of 1788. Further attestations to the likeness were made, says Grosart, by Miss Ruddiman, Professor Vilant of St. Andrews,⁶ and Mr. Howden, a jeweller.⁷ These attestations, however, probably related to any of the portraits of the 1782 "series" (i.e., the original and its engraved copies), since Professor Vilant had approved the 1800 St. Andrews edition portrait. It should be remembered that all of these people were very old at the time they gave their testimonies and they may not have been able to remember Fergusson particularly well--just as Sommers obviously remembered very little of Fergusson's life and appearance despite the long acquaintance he claims. But, all in all, this particular portrait and its successors have a good basis for substantiation.

In the 1800 edition of Irving a totally unreliable stippled engraving is presented. The 1807 Oddy edition gives a portrait for which the poet's sister, Margaret Duvall, posed. Both of these must be rejected.

While Grosart had very assuredly stated that the portrait in his four editions "faithfully--literally represents the poet,"⁸ in 1897 he changed his mind. He had found a painting

6. Attested in a letter of n.d. in the Grosart-Laing Correspondence at Edinburgh University.

7. Grosart, Works, p. xii.

8. p. xi.

of Fergusson⁹ in the possession of the Raeburn family, and the tradition of this painting was that it had been painted by Runciman and had been given by him to Raeburn. If this is true, we are very fortunate, for Raeburn was nineteen when Fergusson died and he must have seen the poet; he accepted the picture as a good likeness. The acceptance of all this, however, has been too general and too uncritical. The portrait was not painted by Runciman. It is not his style; it does not show his considerable skill.¹ And then--a minor objection--it bears no resemblance to the Prodigal portrait.

But what can be said in its defense as a portrait of Fergusson? It did hold the tradition among the Raeburns of being a likeness of Fergusson (but it also held the untrue tradition of having been painted by Runciman).² It may have been given to Raeburn by Runciman: for example, it may have been the work of one of his students. The portrait was done c. 1770 and it depicts a person with the physical characteristics of Fergusson: long nose, heavy chin, brownish grey hair. In all details the 1782 caricature could have been of just such a

3. Works (Dent edition), p. xi.

9. Now in the National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh.
1. I am indebted to Mr. Ronald Hutchison, Curator of the National Portrait Gallery, for this technical information.
2. This is attested in Dr. John Brown's Horae Subsecivae (see Ford, Robert, ed., Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson, Edinburgh 1905, p. lxiv). The portrait he describes can be no other than this one.

man as is here portrayed. The hair is even the color of a lock of Fergusson's hair which is preserved in the National Library of Scotland. The eyes are large, the lips full; the general impression is of a young, though haggard, sensitive person. A close study of written descriptions and a comparison of these with the portrait itself will satisfy any critical person that a strong possibility exists.

If the authenticity of the portrait must rest upon its origin, we are not without a conjecture on that point. The Deas edition of the poems presents a plausible explanation:

There were two portraits of Fergusson finished, one by the celebrated Runciman, the other by Mr Fyfe, North Bridge, Edinburgh; but it is feared both of these are now lost. The portrait [of the 1782 series] prefixed to this edition...has met with the approbation of several of his surviving intimates and relations...

Since the biography in this volume relies largely on Sommers, there is no doubt the Runciman portrait mentioned is the Prodigal. The other portrait, then, can be assigned to "Mr Fyfe." Who was Fyfe?⁴ That is nowhere recorded. He was undoubtedly a bad minor artist, perhaps a pupil of Runciman. The portrait

3. Works (Deas edition), p. xi.

4. A "Mr Fyfe" was a singer in Edinburgh in 1769 but it seems a weak basis upon which to found a connection. Another Fyfe was an engraver who flourished in 1736, and yet another was a Cape Club member. The Edinburgh Directories and other reference books do not supply suitable candidates.

a very thorough knowledge of Fergusson's appearance, he would not agree that it could possibly be a painting of the poet.

is bad minor work and, if we cannot assign it to Runciman, we must certainly not reject Fyfe.

The biographers tell us there are four extant portraits of Robert Fergusson. John A. Fairley claims that all of them differ.⁵ But it is my assumption that the personal characteristics of three of them do not differ and that the fourth (the *Prodigal*) was done by an artist who, in his work, was exercising his own conceptions rather than attempting a likeness of his model. The remaining three portraits were done by at least two, and perhaps three, different artists: the petition sketch by Cummyng (?), the caricature by Runciman (it is very much like his work), and the painting by Fyfe (or possibly yet another bad artist). Is it a coincidence that all three have characteristics common to one another, characteristics corroborated by Fergusson's contemporaries?⁶

5. Fairley, *The Published Portraits*, p. 7.

6. There is one last portrait to note, although it can hardly be a depiction of Fergusson. Some time ago a painting was discovered in a Masonic lodge and it was found to be labeled "Robert Fergusson, Poet." I have not seen the piece, but a reliable informant, Mr. Herbert Down, FSA Scot., has; with a very thorough knowledge of Fergusson's appearance, he would not agree that it could possibly be a painting of the poet.

Acknowledgments

The undertaking of this research leaves me indebted to many persons, so large a number that some must remain anonymous. I wish, however, to offer thanks to the following: Professor W. L. Renwick, Edinburgh University; Dr. Allan MacLaine, Texas Christian University; Miss Mary Balfour and her assistants, Edinburgh Public Library; Mr. Alexander Law; Mr. Matthew P. McDiarmid, Queen's University of Belfast; Mr. James Finlayson, Edinburgh University; Mr. Herbert Down; Mr. Sydney Goodsir Smith; Mr. Ronald P. Doig, St. Andrews University. I have been very much pleased with the friendliness and help of librarians whenever I had need to ask for information. Librarians at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh University Library, The British Museum, the National Library of Ireland, The Mitchell Library in Glasgow, the Edinburgh Public Library, the Harvard University Library, the Yale University Library, the St. Andrews University Library, and many others have my sincere gratitude.

The conclusion is reasonable, though we should not discount the probability of errors in eighteenth century internal registers.

W. G.

Edinburgh, 4 April 1955

1. The Parish Register, County of Edinburgh, Register House, Edinburgh. This record is here for the first time properly quoted and its source correctly noted.

The place of his birth was Tarland, Aberdeenshire.² Since
CHAPTER ONE

nothing is left of the parish registers of Tarland, we have

to rely solely on the document already mentioned for an idea
of his origin.

When Elizabeth Fergusson and her two children joined
William Fergusson in Edinburgh, there was a room already

The document is a legal application by one Francis
prepared for them in a low building in the Cap and Feather
Farquharson of Finzean (in Birse, Aberdeenshire) for the
Close. This was a blind alley on the High Street between
right to execute the estate of Henry Fergusson. The latter,
present-day South Bridge and Cockburn Street; it was destroyed
a lister (door) first of Tarland and later of Auchindoir,
about 1765 to make way for the North Bridge. In such confined
had made bonds of provision to his son, William Fergusson, under
surroundings Robert Fergusson was born in the year 1750:

Wednesday 5th September

To William Fergusson Clerk to Baillie Robert Baillie Merchant
in N[ew] K[irk] P[arish] & Elizabeth Forbes his spouse A
S[on] N[amed] Robert said by the a[bove] mentioned parents into
to have been born this morning W[itnesses] David Lindsay
Ind[well] in S[outh] K[irk] P[arish] & James Farquharson
Clerk to James Fullerton Merchant in Leith.¹

Robert's parents were of Aberdeenshire background.

We cannot attach an "ell of genealogy" to William Fergusson.

There is a document to which we can turn for information, but
first let us deal with the question of his birth. He died in 1767

"aged 53 years" and that would mean that he was born in 1713 or

1714. The conclusion is reasonable, though we should not discount

the probability of errors in eighteenth century interment registers.

1. The Parish Register, County of Edinburgh, Register House,
Edinburgh. This record is here for the first time properly
quoted and its source correctly noted.

2. Campbell, Alexander, An Introduction to the History of Poetry
in Scotland (Edinburgh 1796), p. 289.

3. See Appendix A. The following summation is based on McR[obert],
A. T., "The Ancestry of Robert Fergusson--Scottish Poet,"
Scottish Notes and Queries, v. XII, 3rd series, January 1934.

The place of his birth was Tarland, Aberdeenshire.² Since nothing is left of the parish registers of Tarland, we have to rely solely on the document already mentioned for an idea of his origin. *...in a bill...drawn by the defunct Henry*

The document³ is a legal application by one Francis Farquharson of Finzean (in Birse, Aberdeenshire) for the right to execute the estate of Henry Ferguson. The latter, a litster (dyer) first of Tarland and later of Auchindoir, had made bonds of provision to his son, William Ferguson, under which William was to receive 360 merks Scots in 1740, 180 merks Scots in 1741, and 1,000 merks Scots on the first Whitsunday after Henry Ferguson's death (1743). William Ferguson ran into debt and he assigned the first bond of 360 merks to Farquharson, still owing 60 merks. For the purpose of collecting this debt, Farquharson was granted the right of executry over the first bond of provision on 8 January 1740. William Ferguson sank still deeper in debt, and on 27 November 1744 he found it necessary to assign the two remaining bonds to his creditor. In consequence, Farquharson once again applied for rights of executry over Henry Ferguson's estate. An edict was made on 21 December 1746 and Farquharson was granted confirmation of his right on 28 January 1747. Before discussing the significance

2. Campbell, Alexander, An Introduction to the History of Poetry in Scotland (Edinburgh 1798), p. 289.
3. See Appendix A. The following summation is based on McR[obert], A. T., "The Ancestry of Robert Fergusson--Scottish Poet," Scottish Notes and Queries, v. XII, 3rd series, January 1934.

of these transactions, it should be noted that part of the money Farquharson was to receive was "the sum of Nine hunder and forty five pound scots money prin[cip]le and...rent [interest] thereof...in a bill...drawn by the defunct [Henry Ferguson] upon and accepted by Peter Gordon of Abirgeldy..." (The money was to have been repaid in 1733 by Gordon, the eleventh laird of Abergeldie,⁴ but he had died in that year and the debt was left to his son.) This debt clearly reveals that Henry Ferguson was a man of sufficient substance to be able to lend money to a landowner of his district. The bonds of provision themselves imply Henry Ferguson's financial well-being, for the giving of such bonds was a practice of landholding families.

If we credit this document as concerning William Fergusson, the father of the poet, we will find that we have fairly substantial information about him. To begin with, we may say that he came of a landholding, or at least a prosperous, family. If the bonds were given in anticipation of William's marriage, then he may have married about 1738. On the other hand, it is more likely that the provisions were made simply in lieu of a will, a common practice of the time. The amount of the last payment indicates such an arrangement. Further,

⁵ The references are in the Register House, Edinburgh.

4. McDiarmid, Matthew P., The Poems of Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1954), v. I, p. 81.

William Fergusson must have failed in his business and consequently run into debt; this would explain why he left Tarland to go to Edinburgh about 1747.

Why should we believe that the document concerns the father of the poet? There is a strong argument. No other Fergussons are known to have been associated with Tarland outside of the Henry and William Ferguson mentioned in the grants of executry, and Robert Fergusson's father. We know the poet's father came from such a background, for he was well educated and probably trained to a business which concerned the processing of cloth; at least two of his five later employments were connected with that industry. The argument now proceeds logically to further conclusions.

There was a Hary Fergus[s]on who must have been an elder brother to William. He appears twice in the Parochial Register, County of Aberdeen, Auchindoir:

Ferguson	July 14 [1738] Hary Farguison in the parish of Tarland & Elizabeth Gordon in this parish were
&	contracted consigning pledges for performance
Gordon	&c & yr purposes having been Regularly intimate[d] & no Objection offered were Married July 27th.
Ferguson	June 26th [1742] Hary Ferguson Litster at Auchindore had a child baptized named Hary. John Ronald in Boghead & James Gordon in Lonhead Witnesses ⁵

5. The references are in the Register House, Edinburgh.

Hary had carried the family trade to Auchindoir. (His father may later have gone there to live with him.) In the meantime William had remained in the same business in Tarland. Before now biographers have said that William Fergusson was apprenticed to a merchant in Aberdeen; if this were so, some record of his apprenticeship and his habitation there might be found. As it is, no such record is among the archives of the city.⁶ Undoubtedly he was apprenticed to his father in Tarland and there, besides gaining knowledge of the dyeing business, which was useful to him later, he learned to keep accounts.

In the late 1730's or early 1740's, William Fergusson was married to Elizabeth Forbes. Her family was fairly well-to-do and it may be supposed that in marrying Fergusson she was not stepping out of her own class. Her father was John Forbes of Templeton, Kildrummy, who claimed a connection with the Forbesees of Tolquhon. She was the fifth born of six children:

March 6th [1714]

John Forbes in Templeton had a female child baptized named Elizabeth Mr George Ker in Drumnahoove & Alexander Ker in Drumlachy & William Reid of Auchmillen Witnesses

6. For this information, I am indebted to the Town Clerk of Aberdeen.
7. Parochial Register, County of Aberdeen, Kildrummy (at the Register House, Edinburgh). Other Forbes children whose births are recorded in the Register are: Alexander, born 1705; Anna, born 1707; Barbara, born 1709; John, born 1711; Hary, born 1716. John married Jean Dalrymple, the housekeeper and ward of Lord Findlater. He became factor to that nobleman and also to Keith Urquhart of Meldrum. He figures later in Robert Fergusson's story.

about To William and Elizabeth three children were born "near Tarland"⁸--most likely, in the parish of Tarland itself.⁹ Henry was born in 1742, Barbara in 1744, and John in 1746. John must have died a year or so after his birth.¹

It is obvious that by 1747 William Fergusson's responsibilities were weighty and that his business had become more hopeless with each succeeding year. He had given up all expectation of a fairly substantial inheritance and it no longer seemed advisable for him to remain in Tarland and sink to worse and worse financial depths. It was better to abandon any idea of resuscitation and to go to Edinburgh where some opportunity might be opened to him. After the last portions of his expectations had been granted to Francis Farquharson by the courts, he departed for Edinburgh, perhaps not without a letter of recommendation to some merchant in the city who could use his services as an "accomptant." He left alone. Not until he had "furnished a room and saved £9 over" was he able to send for his family. It would take him

8. Grosart, Alexander Balloch, Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1898), p. 27.

9. If Campbell (p. 289) and others had been correct about William Fergusson's having worked in Aberdeen, it could be expected that some of his children would have been born there. But there is no record of their births in either of the Aberdeen parishes.

1. Had John died in Edinburgh, he probably would have been buried in the Canongate churchyard, but no record of that appears. Often, however, the incompetent sextons did not bother writing down the names of infants buried.

see The Edinburgh Evening Courier, 24 July 1773 and 11 February 1764.

about a year to do that. He must have gone to Edinburgh in 1747, soon after all his hopes in Tarland were gone, and his wife and children must have joined him in the middle or latter part of 1748.²

Three days after arriving in Edinburgh William Fergusson was able to get employment.³ He was fortunate as far as acquiring the work is concerned, but the work itself was not very remunerative. In fact, he had to drudge evenings at copying papers and doing whatever else was possible in order to keep his family. Even with that he was unable to make ends meet during the first few years. His first clerkship was with Robert Baillie, who was a "baillie," or magistrate, of the city, and also a merchant in the import and export business. It is often said that Baillie was a haberdasher, but that idea can be traced back to an error on Campbell's part.⁴ The

2. McDiarmid (p. 1) says that William Fergusson went to Edinburgh about 1748. On p. 7 he says the most likely date is 1749. He gives no reason for either choice.
3. Campbell, p. 289. Sommers, Thomas, The Life of Robert Fergusson, The Scottish Poet (Edinburgh 1803), p. 8: "...although he for some time attempted in vain to procure a permanent situation as a clerk, [he] only acted occasionally in that capacity to those of various professions..." There seems to be no question, despite this statement, that Fergusson was quite regularly employed as a clerk.
4. Campbell confused him with James Baillie who was a haberdasher. Further, Campbell says that this man was the first haberdasher in Edinburgh, which is untrue, for there were many mercers in the town previously and this trade is the same as haberdashery. For notice of James Baillie, the haberdasher, see The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 14 July 1760 and 11 February 1764.

business with which Fergusson found himself connected probably concerned the selling of rum and tea as well as the purchasing of goods for export to the colonies.⁵ He kept accounts for his employer and engaged in the disbursing of payments.

A year after Robert's birth, William Fergusson wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, John Forbes of Round Lichnot, telling him something of his home, his expenses, and his then "thriving boy," Robert.

Edinburgh, 19th December, 1751.

Sir,

Your favours of 15th I duly received, and am glade thereby to learn that you and Mrs. Forbes are well. You take no notice which of the two ways I proposed was most convenient with respect to reimbursing you for value of the meall. Meantime your correspondent at Aberdeen may be advised to cask yr about 3 bolls newest miln'd meall. Ship it on board the first boat from that place for Lieth [Leith], marked 'R. Baillie, Edinburgh,' by which it will be brought to Edinburgh at sight, and give me an opportunity of paying freight, shore-dues, and cartage myself, and upon sight of price of meall, cask, couperage, shipping, &c., shall order your money in the way seems most agreeable. As to my situation, it is same as formerly, and can't propose to make any advance on my wages, with my present master. It's not impossible to find more encouragement in the place, but my loss is want either of interest or acquaintances to recommend me; and had I not continued my family in the country until I furnished a room and saved £9 over, I could not [have] had subsistence, as you'll see by an abstract of last year's expences. I have sometimes some shillings when I pay money away to persons on my masters account. Write's at spare hours to some acquaintances, for which gets complements, either a cheese, a ham, a cap or frock to some of the little ones; and

5. For Baillie's advertisement of his goods, see The Edinburgh Evening Courant of 3 December 1751.

though his notebooks, which may be at Barnbougle Castle (see Bibliography), might help to substantiate his MS. sources. Internal evidence, fairly sound, is our only resort.

particularly I have the charge of posting up a dealer's books, which can be expedite in six of my spare hours in the week, for which I have 40s. sterling yearly: last summer, in the mornings, I wrote eight quire of paper at a penny a-page, for which I'm to get £3, 4s. My wife joins in her love to you, Mrs. Forbes, and sister when you see her. Rob, the young one, is a thriving boy. Harry is well advanced in his Latine, expounding Ovid, M. and C. Nepos. Babie has been tender of late, but now thought better. However much you have reason to think I have been on the ceremony in not writing so oft as you might have expected, believe me no emergency happening in the course of my situation made me the more easy. Shall be glade to know if I could in the least be usefull to you here, or if [you] had ever any business in the place, that might fall under my care, the same should be negotiat with all expedition.

Grain is now on the falling here, having last Friday sold 20d. p. boll cheaper at Haddington than day before. Meall sold here last week at 12d. and 11-1/2d. p. peck, sells this week at 11d.--I am, Sir,

Your affe. brother, and most hubl. servt.,

Will. Fergusson

The change of parish indicates that the Fergussons had now moved from the Gap and the other side

ABSTRACT OF EXPENCESS, ANNO 1751.

House-rent, Street.	£ 1	10	0
Coals,	2	12	0
Candles,	0	19	6
Bread,	4	6	8
Milk,	2	4	5
Flesh and fish,	3	6	2-1/2
Salt, greens, and barley,	0	8	8
* * * [torn away with wafer], [meal?]	1	10	4
Washing,	0	13	0
Quarter-payments for children, &c.,	1	15	0
	£19	5	9-1/2

a decent wage for his labors. For that matter, he

N.B.--4s. 2-1/2d. and chance for shoes, shirts, clothes, &c.⁷

7. Grosart, Alexander Balloch, The Works of Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1851), p. xxviii ff. Of all the letters which Grosart presents, we can only trust his word that they existed. We have not found them, though his notebooks, which may be at Barnbogle Castle (see Bibliography), might help to substantiate his MS. sources. Internal evidence, fairly sound, is our only resort.

For the present, we will not comment on the contents of that letter, but continue with the information which we can derive from other sources. In 1753 Baillie and others had entered

The next event we know of was the birth of another child, a daughter, the last born of the Fergusson children. It should not burden the text to quote once again from the Parish Register, County of Edinburgh:

the ship was wrecked off Peterhead in 1754. Tuesday 27 Nov: 1753

To William Fergusson Clerk to Mr Robert Baillie Mert in Edr in S[outh] E[ast] : p[arish] Elizt Forbes his Spouse A D[aughter] N[amed] Margarat W[itnesses] John Farquhar [sic] Mert & Geo. Forbes Mert both in N[ew] K[irk] P[arish] The Child was Born the 26 Inst.⁸

The change of parish indicates that the Fergussons had now moved from the Cap and Feather Close to new quarters on the other side of the High Street.

William Fergusson was about to enter a very insecure period of his life, for Robert Baillie's business affairs were to receive a shock and Baillie himself was to go into bankruptcy.

Baillie's affairs probably were never on too sound a basis and certainly his industrious clerk never gained what he considered a decent wage for his labors. For that matter, he was already applying for a post in the customs through his brother-in-law,

Forbes. Although he continued to pursue this object for some years,⁹ he was never successful in attaining it.

8. Register House, Edinburgh.

9. See Appendix B for letter of Walter Morrison to John Forbes which expresses the former's inability to help Fergusson.

The shock which jolted William Fergusson out of his employment with Baillie was the shipwreck of the Elizabeth and Peggy of Leith. In 1753 Baillie and others had entered into a venture to ship goods and indentured servants to Carolina by that vessel. That part of the cargo on Baillie's account consisted of hardware, cloth, candles, etc. The purchase of these goods had indebted Baillie to the amount of £298. When the ship was wrecked off Peterhead in 1754, he was completely ruined and his creditor, Alexander McDougall, agreed to put the matter up to arbitration--i.e., bankruptcy proceedings. It should be of a certain interest to us that Fergusson is mentioned twice in the decret which records the court actions. On 7 July 1753 his name appears as disbursing payments for goods on Baillie's behalf:

Paid of Charges by Bailley Robert Bailley...Paid by William Fergusson at shipping goods per the Elizabeth and Peggy one pound, one shilling and three pence...Paid by ditto Bailley for Land...and other customhouse fees, at shipping the outward cargo and as expenses of recovering the drawback on the debenture goods four pounds two shillings and one penny...¹

On 16 May 1754 he is a bidder at the auction of the effects of the ship at Peterhead: "A tarpaulion sett up at four shillings, And carryed by William Fergusson at six shillings and six pence."²

1. Decreet of Alexander McDougall, Edinburgh Room, Edinburgh Public Library.
2. Ibid.

Inconsequential, perhaps, but we may feel some satisfaction in knowing that Baillie's displaced clerk made the best of a hopeless situation.

New employment awaited Fergusson, but it was no improvement. Archibald Hope of Rankeillor, a man of very unpleasant character, hired Fergusson as his clerk³ at a wage of £25 per annum. Hope treated him somewhat more politely than he had the six clerks who had preceded him in the six months previous, but that was not necessarily with a great deal more courtesy. A further disadvantage was that the work took Fergusson to Linlithgowshire, away from his family. Now, more than ever, he looked longingly toward a post in the customs. Through the offices of a milliner who was distantly related to Lord and Lady Deskford, he was seeing what might be done about it. He took occasion to mention these affairs in a letter to Forbes who, he hoped, would be diligent in extricating him from his unpleasant employment with an insufferable tyrant:

Midhope, 17th February, 1755.

Dear Brother,

After receipt of yours of 16th December last, I went in to Edinburgh in consequence of my bargain with Mr. Hope, and was a fortnight extremely busie in settling accounts for and

3. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 33.

with Mr. Baillie, and we parted exceeding good friends; and ever since my return here, have been exceedingly hurried, otherways I would have wrote you ere now. As to Mr. Hope's business, I'm determined to have nothing to do with either him or it either, after Martinmas. I wish it may be in my power to stay till then: last half-year he chang'd no less than six clerks; he is a most insulting tyrant. In short, he is quite destitute of the most, if not all the social virtues; and altho' the neighbourhood all agree that he behaves with more decency to me than any he ever had before, yet he is so implacable in every respect that I'm weary of my life, and will be unhappy untill the expiration of our term. The gentlewoman that recommended me to Lady Mary Deskford is Miss Billy Fraser, Milliner in Edinburgh, who, I suppose, is a niece of the late Collonell Ogilvie's. I make no doubt but you'll take the opportunity if you find it favourable when Lord Deskford is in the North, as I also hope Mr. Morison will do, to speak [to] his Lordship on my account, as this place is intollerable, and that my family requires my being in constant business. You may be sure that, had this place been any way agreeable, I would not have hesitate about settling my family in this countrey; but it is better they stay in Edinburgh, as I hope to be with them myself nine months hence, if spared.

You certainly have interpret my last wrong, when you write that I talk'd lightly of £25. I know the value of money better than that; and shall use all possible means to keep myself in some business or other, altho' the present has but a dire aspect. Shall be glade to hear more frequently from you now, while under this so arbitrary jurisdiction, because to hear of friends' welfare will contribute much to lighten the burden.

Complements to Mrs. Forbes and Sister.

I am, Dear Brother,

Your most affectionate brother and
humble servant,

Will. Fergusson.⁴

4. Grosart, Works, pp. xxxi, xxxii.

5. The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 12 June 1773.

6. 1814.

Again the customs was not to offer a solution to his difficulties. He left Archibald Hope of Rankeillor, presumably, in November 1755. Fully prepared for any escape, he was fortunate enough to obtain work with equal compensation for his services, even though it proved to be something of a headache. This post was with "John Peat, or Alexander Wardrop and Company," upholsterers in Carrubbers Close.⁵ We already have seen that Fergusson was qualified in some degree for a business which was concerned with cloth goods, besides his being an experienced accountant. This business did not hold him for long, however. In the midst of keeping accounts on furniture, curtains, wallpaper, and furnishings for funerals,⁶ he wrote to his brother-in-law in a discouraged vein of the difficulties he was enduring:

Edinburgh, March 9th, 1756.

Dear Brother,

I was glade to find by your last that Mrs. Forbes and you were well, and of your success in obtaining an addition to your living. I thought to have wrote you before now, but am so much hurried that I have scarce time to eat and sleep sufficiently, which is the more uneasy, that it adds nothing to my gain. The Company I serve are 15 Wrights who have entered in contract to carry on the branch's of business. The upholstery goods and hardware are sold for account of the Company, but all the household furniture is sold for the proper account of the respective proprietors. It is lodged in a large wareroom, blended together for sale, which creates an endless writing and

5. The Edinburgh Evening Courant, 12 June 1773.

6. Ibid.

constant attendance, and which [what?] is still more uncomfortable, none of these gentlemen understand accounts, nor the trouble in keeping them regular; but every one of them has a particular veneration for meum, so that I have not a farthing value of a perquizite, nor time either to oblige a friend nor gain a sixpence; so that my sallery of £25 realy can't be a subsistence to my family; exclusive of coal, candle, and cloathes which are absolutely necessary, omitting house rent, amounts only to £4 3s. 4d. a head per annum: and till now, since I came to this place never felt so much the loss of time to do something in, for myself: besides [loss of] perquizites at paying of accounts. It's pity you had so little time with Lord Deskford when in the North: if you could use the freedom to write his Lordship under cover to me soon, representing the connection between us, and with as much modest assurance as possible solicit his intrest to procure me any settlement in the Customs above a Tidesman it would be singularly obliging: and if once introduced to his Lordship in that channel, possibly I may get your intrest supported by some others in this place, who can ascertain my diligence and sobriety.

Shall be glad to hear from you soon. Your sister after a long struggle between two opinions is at length to commence a settler here after Whitsunday next; for particulars I referr you to what she writes herewith. Hary still unprovided, from a gratefull sense of your civilities desires to be remembred to you, Mrs. Forbes and Jack Auld, and we all join in our compliments to Mrs. Forbes. My wife has had a web for severall months on the stocks which I hope will soon be ready for launching.

I remain, D[ear] B[rother],

Your affe. Brother, &c.

Will. Fergusson.⁷

Grosart says he owned a "very ingenious and useful 'Book of Rates'"⁸ which was formulated by William Fergusson while in the employ of the upholsterers. It cannot be ascertained how long

⁷ According to the original manuscript.

7. Grosart, Works, pp. xxxiv, xxxv.

8. p. xxxv. It may be that this "Book," as well as family letters, were among the collection of the late Lord Rosebery (see The Catalogue of the Barnbogle Castle Library of 1885).

William Fergusson remained at this work. Without any documentation, it is not possible to rely fully on Grosart, who says that he left after four months⁹ to accept a clerkship with Walter Ferguson, a writer, or soliciter, who dealt largely in real estate, as is the custom of Edinburgh solicitors. We know, at least, that William Fergusson was already settled in the writer's office by the time the looked-for provision had been made for Hary. ~~not~~ have significance in relation to William Fergusson. He found William Fergusson devoted to his work and ambitious for success, and while we cannot say that Edinburgh ever granted his great fortune, it is obvious that he was not unsuccessful. To depict him as a humble and unrewarded doer, as Grosart has done, is a mistake. He was trained to business and he did as well as could be expected in his field.

The home he provided for his family has alike been covered with a cloud of Grosart's gloom, for he has implied that the household was ever overcast with poverty. This has been repeated by the biographers who followed Grosart and it has been done in total ignorance of eighteenth century monetary values--when money was worth about twenty times what it is

9. According to William Fergusson's letter of February 1755, he was to leave Hope at Martinmas (11 November), and Grosart (Works, p. xxxvi) writes that he accepted work with Walter Ferguson a few days after writing his letter of 9 March.

1. Campbell, p. 269.

CHAPTER TWO

The character of the poet's father is seen quite vividly. His letters indicate that he was a man of some education and the work in which he engaged himself points to a substantial business training. Campbell tells us that he had indulged in writing poetry in his younger days.¹ This, of course, may or may not have significance in relation to Robert Fergusson. We find William Fergusson devoted to his work and ambitious for success, and while we cannot say that Edinburgh ever granted him great fortune, it is obvious that he was not unsuccessful. To depict him as a humble and unrewarded drudge, as Grosart has done, is a mistake. He was trained to business and he did as well as could be expected in his field.

The home he provided for his family has alike been covered with a cloud of Grosart's gloom, for he has implied that the household was ever overcast with poverty. This has been repeated by the biographers who followed Grosart and it has been done in total ignorance of eighteenth century monetary values--when money was worth about twenty times what it is today. William Fergusson at first had difficulty making ends meet in Edinburgh. But as time went on, when his wage increased

2. [Peterkin, Alexander]. *The Works of Robert Fergusson* (London

1. Campbell, p. 289.

to £25 per year, he was certainly enjoying a substantial income, although it was always a struggle to support his family at his own social level. To have enough left over for the education of his children, to have a home somewhat better than that of the average lower middle class citizen, to have some minimum of luxury, meant the practice of traditional Scottish thrift and industry. It was possible at that time to keep a family on £15 a year; William Fergusson wanted, and certainly he was accustomed to, something better. In the end, he did not look upon his life's accomplishments as a fruitless progression of failures and disappointments.

It is unfortunate that we have no idea of William Fergusson's influence on his son. He had written occasional poetry, and we know he had a knowledge of literature to pass on. He may have been directly responsible for his son's earliest ventures in poetry, for Robert certainly was a poet from his childhood days. William Fergusson had a strength of personality which impressed itself upon his children--Hary, despite his instability, showed a penetrating intellect and strong capabilities, and Margaret possessed a mind which stamped her "a genuine relative of Fergusson."² No doubt he was a strict father and, in their

2. [Peterkin, Alexander], The Works of Robert Fergusson (London 1807), p. 14.

later years, Hary and Robert reacted against his discipline.

Little can be said of Elizabeth Forbes. Campbell, writing twelve years after her death, describes her as "a woman of great worth and piety,"³ but obviously Campbell had never known her. We know from Campbell, too, that she was devoted to her youngest son and that the "untoward circumstance" of his ill health as a child (and throughout his life) "peculiarly endeared him to his mother."⁴ As a result, he was a great deal under her attention and tutelage and she taught him to read before his first attendance at school.⁵ Robert's devotion to his mother has been emphasized by his biographers. An anecdote of this period hints at the religious influence which she impressed on her home:

Religion had made an early impression on the warm imagination of Fergusson. Even in infancy, it shewed itself in a variety of instances, which, were it to any purpose, might be pleasing to relate. Among others, the following may suffice as an exemple [*sic*]. His delight was in reading the bible. He there found the richest fund of entertainment. It would seem, that the book of Solomon's proverbs had attracted his particular attention. One day he came running into his mother's chamber, all bathed in tears, calling to her, in the most earnest manner imaginable, to whip him. The good woman alarmed at this unusal [*sic*] behaviour of her boy, enquired the cause, when he told her with all the simplicity of innocence, "O mother! he that spareth the rod, hateth his child."⁶

3. Campbell, p. 289.

4. *Ibid.*

5. p. 290.

6. pp. 290, 291.

Hary never completed his full term of five years' apprenticeship.

The importance of that story must not be minimized, for as the years went by, Robert was infected by morbid views of Philip's school in Niddry's Wynd. He had learned to read and to religion. They came, in part, from his home, but Scotland has ever been afflicted with the over-regarded virtue of extreme and gloomy piety: that it pervaded the Fergusson household is remained there until the spring of 1757, a little more than six months. If anything is to be blamed, it should be Robert's individual sensitive reaction to his environment. His home there, but he probably studied English reading and writing, and cannot really be said to have imposed any restrictions on the arithmetic. The fees amounted to about three shillings per quarter, with an additional two shillings per annum "for coal and candles" as set by Council regulations.

After an education embracing both ancient and modern languages,⁷ Hary Fergusson, Robert's older brother, was apprenticed to Burn and Finlayson, merchants in the Luckenbooths, the deteriorating and overcrowded High School to which Robert that row of shops and warehouses which stood right in the middle was sent in the following autumn. At the High School it was of the High Street. The apprenticeship was commenced 10 August 1757 and the Roll of Apprentices describes Hary as the son of and on 1 October 1757 Robert entered the "Ardiments Class" of "William Ferguson, clerk to Mr. Walter Ferguson, Writer..."⁸ John Gilchrist, remaining with him until 1761; he then passed Hary was being trained to follow in his father's footsteps.

It probably was the best that could be done for him, for the Merchant Company was one of the least expensive to join.⁹

7. Campbell, p. 294.

8. The late Dr. Marguerite Wood of the City Chambers extracted this information from the Roll of Apprentices. For the place of business of William Burn, see Courant, 20 February 1764.

9. Heron, Alexander, The Rise and Progress of the Company of Merchants in the City of Edinburgh (Edinburgh 1903). Arnot, Hugo, The History of Edinburgh (Edinburgh 1779), p. 53.

started in October 1757 (Arnot, 13 September 1757). It would necessarily be Robert's starting date. In 1761 Gilchrist again took a beginning class (Arnot, 9 September 1761).

Hary never completed his full term of five years' apprenticeship.

As Hary was preparing to leave school, Robert entered Mr. Philp's school in Niddry's Wynd.¹ He had learned to read and to write at home, as we have seen, and now his formal education was to begin. He enrolled in Mr. Philp's school in 1756 and remained there until the spring of 1757, a little more than six months.² Little is known of the school or of Robert's training there, but he probably studied English reading and writing, and arithmetic. The fees amounted to about three shillings per quarter, with an additional two shillings per annum "for coal and candle" as set by Council regulations.³

It probably provided a more comfortable situation than the deteriorating and overcrowded High School to which Robert was sent in the following autumn. At the High School it was the practice for a master to take a class for a full four years, and on 1 October 1757⁴ Robert entered the "Rudiments Class" of John Gilchrist, remaining with him until 1761; he then passed

1. David Irving (The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson, with the Life of the Author, Glasgow 1800, p. 4) says it was in Blackfriars Wynd, but in 1804 (Lives of the Scottish Poets, v. II, p. 414) he writes it was in Niddry's Wynd. Future references to Irving will be to the first-named book unless otherwise indicated. David Fraser Harris (St. Cecilia's Hall, Edinburgh 1899, p. 11) gives the beginning date of Philp's school as 1750.
2. Irving, p. 4.
3. Courant, 16 November 1761.
4. Sommers (p. 9) and others attest that Fergusson studied under Gilchrist. Since Gilchrist's four-year "cycle" of teaching started in October 1757 (Courant, 13 September 1757), that would necessarily be Robert's starting date. In 1761 Gilchrist again took a beginning class (Courant, 9 September 1761).

into the fifth-year Rector's class.

The class lists of individual teachers at the High School are not preserved. Library lists, which recorded students' library contributions and which were kept by the teacher of each class, have been preserved. In John Gilchrist's lists Robert Fergusson's name appears three times--for 1758, 1760, and 1761. (The lists were made up at the new year rather than in the autumn when the classes started.) In each of these years he contributed one shilling. That his name does not appear for 1759 may mean that he was suffering illness throughout that year or simply that he did not make the contribution. A minimum contribution of a shilling, however, was required from 1760 on.⁵

As schools went in the eighteenth century, the High School enjoyed good repute. In sending his son there William Fergusson must already have developed plans of a university education for him, for he was assuming an extra expense to insure Robert's academic future. But the physical conditions of the school were hardly an incentive to pay these higher fees. The under-salaried

5. The name each time is in Gilchrist's handwriting. McDiarmid (p. 12) gives the years 1758, 1759, 1761 for Fergusson's appearance on the library list, but this is an error on his part. Miss Margaret Cunningham, Rector's Secretary at the High School, made the two volumes of library lists available to me.

masters, of whom there were five, received five shillings from each student, while an additional shilling went to the Rector; there was a great temptation to take on the maximum number of students the small classrooms would contain.⁶ In certain years it was not uncommon for each of the masters to have 100 students.⁷ Further, "The rooms are low-roofed, and by much too small for the number of boys...The area...lies in the neighbourhood... inhabited by the lower class of people. The High School stands in much need of repair; but...it can never be rendered commodious..."⁸ The behavior of the boys was none of the best--homosexuality flourished⁹--and the masters often seemed satisfied to leave for schools of lesser reputation. Nevertheless, at a time when the great public schools of England had degenerated into little more than bodies of uncontrolled students who might be described best as packs of juvenile ruffians and highwaymen, Edinburgh had little cause for embarrassment. Perhaps Robert was more fortunate than most of the boys who attended the High School through those

6. Lees, John; Gib, James; Rae, John; Anderson, James; Barclay, James, Memorial For the Rector and Masters of the High-School of Edinburgh ([Edinburgh] 1749), pp. 4, 5.

7. [Anonymous], Considerations on the Proposals for Building a new Grammar-School, in the city of Edinburgh... (Edinburgh MDCC, LXXV), p. 9.

8. [Anonymous], New High School at Edinburgh (Edinburgh 1777).

9. [Anonymous], Considerations on the Proposals, etc., p. 12.

years, for in his time (1758) the roll of students had fallen were then removed to the Rector's Class, where they read portions in number to but 117,¹ and his teacher, Gilchrist, was a man of highest class some of the scholars remained two years [if they unchallenged abilities.] The Rectors who served between 1757 and 1762, John Lees and Alexander Matheson, were also men of some repute.²

The best description of the masters and of the course of study and regimen which Robert Fergusson underwent is that found in the notes of Henry MacKenzie, who had attended the school a few years earlier:

The state of the High School from 1751-2, when I was six years old, down to 1757...There were in this institution then a rector and four under-masters.

Rector Lee [Lees], a very respectable, grave, gentlemanlike man...He maintained great dignity, meeting the other masters somewhat *de haut en bas*; severe and rather too intolerant of dullness, but kind to more promising talents...

[The master of the] first or youngest class when I was put to school, Farquhar...My master was in great favour with his pupils, about sixty in number...Gilchrist, a good-humoured man with a good deal of comedy about him, also liked by the class...The third, Rae, a severe harsh-tempered man, but an excellent scholar, a rigid disciplinarian and the only frequent flogger of the school, consequently very unpopular with the boys, tho' from the reputation of his superior learning he had more scholars than either of the above-mentioned masters. The fourth, Gibb [sic], an old man...verging toward dotage...[His pupils] liked him from the indulgence which his good-natured weakness and laxity of discipline produced.

The scholars went through the four classes taught by the under-masters, reading the usual elementary Latin books (for at that time no Greek was taught at the High School) and so

1. Trotter, James J., The Royal High School, Edinburgh (London 1911), p. 188.
2. p. 194.

up to Virgil and Horace, Sallust and parts of Cicero. They were then removed to the Rector's Class, where they read portions of Livy along with the other classics above mentioned. In the highest class some of the scholars remained two years [if they failed in the first year].

The hour of attendance was from seven to nine, and, after an interval of an hour for breakfast, from ten to twelve; thereafter another interval of two hours for dinner, latterly I think in my time of three; returned for two hours in the afternoon. They wrote Versions, translations from Latin into English, and at the annual examination in August recited Speeches, as they were called, from some of the Roman poets.³

The day-by-day work of the School would be considered oppressive by modern standards and yet it accomplished what it was designed to accomplish: the creation of a firm background in the Latin tongue. If Robert did not become a strong Latin scholar, it was not the fault of his school, for his master required him to learn all of the rules of Latin grammar in that tongue; not until much later did Rector Alexander Adam formulate a grammar based on an English introduction to Latin.⁴ Before that time Thomas Ruddiman's Rudiments were used.⁵ After the first two intensive years, the students were expected to use the Latin language alone as a classroom medium--a stern penalty

3. Thompson, Harold William, ed., The Anecdotes and Egotisms of Henry MacKenzie 1745-1831 (London 1927), pp. 33, 34.

4. Steven, William, The History of the High School of Edinburgh (Edinburgh MDCCCXLIX), pp. 116 ff.

5. For this and some of the following information concerning the curriculum, I have relied upon the account written by Douglas Young for Sydney Goodsir Smith's Robert Fergusson (pp. 76, 77).

to pay for an education. The practice of speaking Latin had died out in British universities, though it still survived on the Continent and in America; the fact that it was in use at the High School probably attests to the quality of Latin scholarship there. To be added to the Latin authors read in successive years, as related by MacKenzie, is George Buchanan, whose Psalms were translated by the classes. The third year was devoted to reading, the fourth to poetry, composition, and declamation, and the fifth, the Rector's class, to translating classics. Only Latin was taught and, as a matter of fact, the students' ability at English was said to be rather shocking.⁶

The daily routine was translation, interrogation on the syntax encountered in the passages translated, and then continuous retranslation throughout the remainder of the class period.

If the badly stifled schoolboy was able to survive his year's work, each August he had to face an examination "in presence of the...Lord Provost and Magistrates" who "were pleased to distribute a great number of classick authors, handsomely bound and gilt, impressed with the city's arms..."⁷ The nature of the gifts almost seems to add insult to injury.

6. [Anonymous], Considerations on the Proposals, etc., p. 19.

7. Courant, 15 September 1760.

9. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, pp. 22, 89.

year Robert's attendance at the High School was irregular "from bad health,"⁸ but apparently this did not deter him from achieving a good record there, one sufficiently good to aid him in winning a bursary at another school, the Grammar School of Dundee.

There is one more item to add concerning Fergusson's years at the High School. Grosart considered that a vernacular poem, a translation from Horace, Ode XI. Lib. I, evolved from this period:⁹

Ne'er fash your thumb what gods decree
To be the weird o' you or me,
Nor deal in cantrup's kittle cunning
To speir how fast your days are running...

I have doubts that this could have been written by a ten or eleven-year-old boy, but I certainly would not say that Fergusson had written it after the age of fifteen or so. Since it does appear to be connected with a very early date, it is important to notice the already developed interest in the vernacular as well as the skill shown in meter and language. It implies an acquaintance with Allan Ramsay's "translations" of Horace.

It is necessary now to go back a few years to pick up the thread of William Fergusson's varied employments. About the

8. Sommers, p. 9.

9. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, pp. 53, 89.

year 1759 "...he was appointed clerk to the prisoners of war, in the castle of Edinburgh. In this capacity he was of the utmost service to government, as well as to the unfortunate sufferers."¹ These prisoners were from French privateers and naval vessels, most of them captured by Royal Navy ships which had been patrolling local waters since the beginning of the Seven Years' War. As early as April 1757, twenty-eight members of the crew of the Chevalier Bart were incarcerated in the Castle at Edinburgh.² And later, in September 1759, "the French prisoners at Dundee [362 in number] were ordered to be conducted under guard to the castle..."³ Dr. James Walker was appointed agent to these prisoners⁴ and, in some way or other, William Fergusson had a connection with him.⁵ Grosart says that Fergusson's position at the Castle was a "temporary sinecure"

1. Campbell, p. 289.

2. Forbes, J. MacBeth, "French Prisoners of War in Scotland, and Bank Note Forging," Bankers' Magazine (London, March 1899), p. 396. Also see Abell, Francis, Prisoners of War in Britain 1756 to 1815 (Oxford 1914).

3. [Anonymous], A Letter from a Gentleman in Town to His Friend in the Country concerning the Cloathing of the French Prisoners now in the Castle of Edinburgh (Edinburgh 1759), p. 4. The Bankers' Magazine gives the number of these prisoners.

4. Bankers' Magazine, p. 398. Courant, 27 September 1762.

5. The records of the Castle cannot be located, though I have made a thorough search. The Public Record Office informs me of a mention of "Mr. Ferguson, regulating Captain here [at the Castle]" (Letters from North Britain), but this person was probably an army officer. Also see Appendix C.

and that he continued to work in the office of Walter Ferguson until 1763,⁶ but he does not substantiate this. I am of the opinion that the position was not so much of a sinecure, though it may be that William Fergusson held two clerkships at the same time. (Grosart also claims that the clerkship was found through the interest of Lord Deskford,⁷ but again he offers no documentation.) There was a substantial amount of work to be done in connection with the prisoners. The citizens of the town had collected £138⁸ to buy clothing for them; accounts of this money were kept at the shop of James Seton in the Lawnmarket.⁹ In addition to this, the King allowed each prisoner sixpence a day for food and clothing.¹ All this had to be put on the books: it hardly seems logical to refer to such a clerkship as a sinecure. Whether William Fergusson remained in the office of Walter Ferguson after 1759 cannot be known, but he probably did retain the work with Dr. Walker at the Castle until 1763 when the prisoners, then numbering 500, were carried back to France and released.²

6. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 48. Grosart implies (p. 36) the last date of the clerkship was 1763 on the basis of a document of 1763 (see Appendix C). But that document is probably only an indication that William Fergusson took on part time copy work while at the Castle.

7. Ibid.

8. Scots Magazine (Edinburgh), October 1761.

9. [Anonymous], A Letter from a Gentleman, etc., pp. 30, 31.

1. p. 28.

2. Bankers' Magazine, p. 398.

William Fergusson's financial position was considerably strengthened through his connection with the Castle prisoners, and the burden of Robert's education was removed from his shoulders through the acquisition of the bursary. This bursary--or Mortification as it was called--was obtained through "interest," Sommers tells us.³ Whose interest? one wonders. Probably that of Lord Findlater, if anyone.⁴ But by the terms of the bursary Robert was a good candidate, for its founder, the Reverend David Fergusson of Strathmartine, had made the stipulation that two scholars bearing his own name should enjoy the fruits of his bequest. The bursary provided for

the use, maintenance and education of two poor male children not under the age of nine years at their admission, or above fourteen years while they are at the School of Dundee of my own surname and nearest degree of blood to me. Whilks failzing any other two indigent young male children of my own surname--that they be maintained, educated and brought up at the Grammar School of Dundee and lodged there and boarded with one of the surname of Fergusson in case there be any that can do the same, and failzing of that any other honest house within the sd Burgh of a good report--and to furnish the saids children with sufficient cloaths and necessaries for their bodies head and feet their coats being always of a grey colour lined with blue sleeves and it is my will that none of them enjoy the benefite of this mortification but such as will usu [sic] and wear the same livery coats till they attain to the sd age of fourteen years--and I appoint and ordain the sd patrons and administrators

(formerly the Grammar School of Dundee), has communicated

3. Sommers, p. 10.
4. Grosart, Works, p. lxviii, suggests Findlater. Walter Ferguson may have had something to do with it since he required a decret concerning the bursary in 1765 (see Appendix E).

to make tryal if they or either of them be capable of leanning and has an inclination to be schoolers [sic]--I apppoint them to be put to St. Leonards Colledge of St. Andrews for the space of four years.⁵

studies, for when he had turned fourteen years of age, he was. Fortunately, the administrators of the Mortification did not require that the "livery" stipulation be observed.

The patrons of the Mortification requested Murray, with whom Robert was then boarding, to bring the scholar before them in of Robert Fergusson. By the spring of that year he had completed December 1764. Robert stated his inclination to enter the the Rector's class at the High School and he entered the Dundee University of St. Andrews, and accordingly Murray was asked Grammar School the following autumn. The educational system was similar to the one he had left: a thorough classical "certificate of his [son's] capacity for being put to the training with little else. He was to continue his Latin for Colledge." This was done and Robert was ready to enter the two more years. This was certainly to his benefit, for he was but twelve years of age when he went to Dundee and had he,

Before going to St. Andrews, however, he travelled North in another year, entered a university, he could not possibly have gained much from it. The picture of young Fergusson at Dundee is obscure.⁶ We know only that while there, he boarded

5. From the Burgh Court Books of Dundee, 1698, as quoted by Green, Frederick C., Robert Fergussons Anteil an der Literatur Schottlands (Heidelberg 1923), p. 7. See Appendix D for a summation of the same by Professor David Gregory of St. Andrews.

6. Mr. I. M. Bain, Rector of the High School of Dundee (formerly the Grammar School of Dundee), has communicated the following to me: "So far as I am aware, no records survive [of Fergusson's stay at Dundee Grammar School]... The Fergusson bursary no longer operates in the School."

7. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 43.

with "William Fergusson's wife," "Thomas Thomson Wright," and Peter or Patrick Murray.⁷ Undoubtedly he was successful in his studies, for when he had turned fourteen years of age, he was qualified to continue his studies at St. Andrews University. The patrons of the Mortification requested Murray, with whom Robert was then boarding, to bring the scholar before them in December 1764. Robert stated his inclination to enter the University of St. Andrews, and accordingly Murray was asked to inform William Fergusson that he should procure the necessary "certificate of his [son's] capacity for being put to the Colledge."⁸ This was done and Robert was ready to enter the next phase of his education.

Before going to St. Andrews, however, he travelled North with his mother to visit his uncle, John Forbes of Round Lichnot. There he stayed a month or so--August and September.⁹ Two letters which William Fergusson wrote to his wife and to his brother-in-law were recovered by Grosart. One of them reveals that Robert's serious state of health may have been

7. Fairley, John A., Bibliography of Robert Fergusson (Glasgow 1915), p. 5. Fairley obviously had access to the Mortification Trust's papers.

8. For the letters and documents relating to this, see Appendix E.

9. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 45.

one of the reasons for the visit. Both letters contain the amusing episode of an offended ailuraphile:

I had the pleasure of your curt. advising of your family's welfare, at which we are all
My Dearest, I observe with some concern that the aunt's affection's for the cat is not in any degree abated, considering

that now As I hope this will reach you before you set out from Roundlichnot, I hereby acknowledge the receipt of your favours of 13th. This day has removed my anxiety's occasioned by frequent apprehensions of your having met with some disaster in your journey by the bad weather or otherways. I notice your resolution with regard to the time of setting out for home, and approve thereof, notwithstanding I have had a solitary fortnight already, and in view of a third lonely Sabbath, the only time I can command as my own. It gives me no small satisfaction to find, you have had so agreeable a meeting with your brother and sisters, and that Rob has held out the journey. I arrived from Saltonfield, Sunday morning by 9 o'clock, when it rained so hard in this country that I was wet [to] the skin. Your linnen is blue'd, and at the lapping [folding or bending, a technical term], and will be in soon: the cotton piece, not yet off the field, as they are determined for a good colour. Your compts to Kylahuntlie came too late, for they set out for Badenoch with Inverhall Tuesday last and left compts to you. I would have wrote Mr. Forbes and thankd him for his civilities, but had only time to scrawl this for you in the office, during which performance I had twenty interruptions. Meantime I make offer of compts to your brother; Mrs. Forbes, the Aunt in case the care about her cat will allow her to accept of them: and to all other friends and relatives in the neighbourhood. It's become dark, so must conclude with wishing Mr. Forbes and family all possible happiness, and yourself a speedy and safe return.

I am, My Dearest,
Your affe Husband,

Will. Fergusson¹

2. Grosart, Works, pp. xlv, xlvi.

1. Grosart, Works, pp. xlv, xlvi.

Edinburgh, 13th September, 1764.

Dear Sir,

I had the pleasure of your obliging favours of 7th curt. advising of your family's welfare, at which we are all extremely glad. I observe with some concern that the aunt's affection's for the cat is not in any degree alienate, considering that now she has an opportunity of seeing an object that merits her warmest affections: and as my wife has heard nothing from her by this opportunity, she is suspicious of having offended her by saying something she has thought hurtfull to Gibbie's character. My wife was not a bit wearied on her return, and has been in a much better state of health since, than for some years past, and has recovered a keen appetite. It will give me real pleasure to know so oft as opportunity permitts how you, Mrs. Forbes, the Aunt and little Jamie do, as it is the only thing next to a personal interview, which the uninterrupted hurry of business prevents. Baby and her husband are well, and with my wife, Hary, Rob and Pegie join with me in most affectionat compliments to you, Mrs. Forbes, and young son, the Aunt and all other connections in your neighbourhood: being in a hurry,

I am, Dear Sir,

Your most affe. Brother and humble Servt,

Will. Fergusson.

Please mind the Aunt to call for a 1/4 lib of snuff from the waggoner.²

"...the cotton piece is not yet off the field." The "field" probably was the British Linen Bank's bleaching field at Saltoun, near Haddington. For William Fergusson, having left the Castle in 1763, was now working as a clerk at the Bank's Edinburgh

2. Grosart, Works, pp. xlvi, xlvii.

offices in the Canongate. He remained in this presumably financially more desirable post until his death.³

There is another event of this period to record. On 20 May 1764, Barbara Fergusson married David Inverarity, a wright. And shortly before this time, the Fergusson family had moved to another house on the east side of Warriston's Close.⁴

3. Though Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 47) and McDiarmid (p. 13) say that William Fergusson was a managing-clerk in the Bank's linen department, they offer no proof. Mr. R. J. Y. Ferguson of the British Linen Bank tells me that there are no records which give any information about Fergusson's clerkship there. Had he been engaged in the linen bleaching aspect at all, he would have worked for the contractor, Archibald Horn, and not for the Bank (see Malcolm, C. A., The History of the British Linen Bank, Edinburgh 1950, pp. 237-40). Had he been the Bank's clerk receiving the linen to be sent to the Saltoun field, his name should have appeared as such in Horn's advertisements in the Courant between 1763-67; it did not. Dr. C. A. Malcolm suggested to me that Horn's accounts, now in the Charter Room of the Fletchers of Saltoun, might be enlightening as to Fergusson's employment at the Bank if he were connected in any way with the linen bleaching.
4. McDiarmid (p. 13) says, "shortly after" May 1764, but Barbara is described in the Edinburgh Marriage Register as of the "New Kirk p[arish]." This parish ended on the east side of Warriston's Close. The first move of the family--away from the Cap and Feather Close some time before 1753--has already been noted; their move back into the New Kirk Parish was undoubtedly to Warriston's Close.

CHAPTER THREE

For Robert Fergusson, St. Andrews was early rising, drudging, mischief, and poetry.

Although the St. Andrews session began in October, Robert's starting date was retroactive only to November.¹ But the actual date of his arrival at the University was 9 December 1764, on which day he took a room with a Mrs. Gibson at £35 Scots (£2 or £3) a quarter.² His father presented a missive letter from the Fergusson Trust to the United Colleges of St. Salvator and St. Leonard: "Robert Fergusson...is a person duly qualified...therefore we present him, and recommend him to your care..."³ He matriculated 19 February 1765.⁴

* * *

St. Andrews. It was to a mixture of shattered glories and future aspirations that Robert presented himself. Samuel

1. See Appendix E.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Anderson, J. Maitland, ed., The Matriculation Roll of the University of St. Andrews 1747-1897 (Edinburgh 1905). At that time students matriculated only once, upon entering the University. It was observed by a regular ceremony in February.

Johnson, having looked at the inauspicious ruins of the University, wrote, "Had the university been destroyed two centuries ago, we should not have regretted it, but to see it pining in decay and struggling for life fills the mind with mournful images and ineffectual wishes."⁵ Of course, Johnson was at his least charitable when he dealt with Scotland, but others--Scotsmen and Englishmen alike--wrote with even less charity about St. Andrews.

Both town and gown had sunk badly and, though the University was attempting to resurface, the town, which had been a seat of bishops until the Bloodless Revolution, continued to sink. At the beginning of the century there had been four main streets,⁶ but by Fergusson's time only one overgrown thoroughfare was left. The population had declined from 4000⁷ to half that number with the shift of the economic importance to the West, the result of the Union in 1707 and the failure of the fishing trade. "...many of them," wrote William Douglas, "are idle and half starved..."⁸ Two occupations remained to the

5. Johnson, Samuel, A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (London 1775), p. 15.

6. [Douglas, William], Some Historical Remarks on the City of St. Andrews in North-Britain (London M.DCC.XXVIII), p. 7.

7. p. 9.

8. Ibid.

9. Campbell, Alexander, A Journey from Edinburgh through Parts of North Britain (London 1802), pp. 23, 24.

1. Douglas, p. 7.

2. Cant, R. G., The University of St. Andrews. A Short History (Edinburgh 1946), p. 88.

St. Leonard under the one roof of St. Salvator—his favorite townspeople, one being the serving of a maximum of three Colleges. (The St. Leonard buildings were sold to Professor hundred odd Grammar School and University students⁹ and Watson for £200.) A new and enlightened Chancellor was the other being the manufacture of golf balls. The latter chosen: Thomas Hay, the eighth Earl of Kinnoul. It was he who was responsible for raising, competitively, the standards in it. Everywhere the ruins, physical and moral, were visible. Above a thousand uninhabited houses of the once opulent town the library so that it could hold the books it received under were falling apart.¹ The great cathedral, all but toppled its copyright privilege, as well as the volumes which he donated. This took place during two of the years Ferguson was there. rotten present.

To the Earl's credit was the influx of young Scottish noblemen But the University, under the sinewy principalship of who arrived at St. Andrews with their fathers, mothers, sisters, Thomas Tullideph, was pulling itself together. Before his and brothers, to study when they had the time and to play golf time, no improvements had been made for at least a hundred on the St. Andrews Links when they had the inclination. The years. The buildings had decayed through lack of maintenance. Earl obviously visualized a northern Oxford. The students, The teaching system had been absolutely medieval: it was too, responded to the new order of things and enthusiastically called "regenting" and under it a professor, a Johannes formed clubs and societies. Eventually their spirit as a corps Factotum, took a class for a full four years.² In the 1740's manifested itself in an alumni society in Edinburgh. In spite a few foundation-shaking changes were made, and four new and of these improvements, the University was still far away from good teachers--Gregory, Vilant, Wilkie, Watson--were added to its best years. It was both the near-decay of what it had the staff. With parliamentary sanction, in 1747 Tullideph been and the embryo of what it would be. There was a degree amalgamated the faltering rival Colleges of St. Salvator and

9. Campbell, Alexander, A Journey from Edinburgh through Parts of North Britain (London 1802), pp. 23, 24.

1. Douglas, p. 7.

2. Cant, R. G., The University of St. Andrews, A Short History (Edinburgh 1946), p. 88.

St. Leonard under the one roof of St. Salvator--his favorite College. (The St. Leonard buildings were sold to Professor Watson for £200.³) A new and enlightened Chancellor was chosen: Thomas Hay, the eighth Earl of Kinnoul. It was he who was responsible for raising, competitively, the standards of scholarship. He also was responsible for the enlarging of the library so that it could hold the books it received under its copyright privilege, as well as the volumes which he donated. This took place during two of the years Fergusson was there. To the Earl's credit was the influx of young Scottish noblemen who arrived at St. Andrews with their fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers, to study when they had the time and to play golf on the St. Andrews Links when they had the inclination.⁴ The Earl obviously visualized a northern Oxford. The students, too, responded to the new order of things and enthusiastically formed clubs and societies.⁵ Eventually their esprit de corps manifested itself in an alumni society in Edinburgh. In spite of these improvements, the University was still far away from its best years. It was both the near-cadaver of what it had been and the embryo of what it would be. There was a degree

3. p. 92.

4. p. 94.

5. p. 95.

of corruption among the professors and a want of discipline among the students. Little had been done to maintain the physical institution. And as for the educational institution, despite its learned and capable professors, scholastic standards barely conformed with the general eighteenth century low point. In 1775 Samuel Johnson had not taken all the possibilities into account, but his eloquent lament was not too far wrong.

We like to visualize Fergusson at this time according to his own words:

Say ye, red gowns! that aften here
Hae toasted bakes to Katie's beer,
Gin 'ere thir days hae had their peer,
Sae blyth, sae daft!
You'll ne'er again in life's career
Sit ha'f sae saft.

Elegy to John Hogg

Undoubtedly his university days, while they imposed a great deal of hard work, were happy and irresponsible.

Fergusson never actually wore the distinctive red gown of St. Andrews but "claes black as soot," because he was a student of theology.⁶ His biographers all agree that he was pursuing

6. Campbell, Journey from Edinburgh, p. 14. The poem Elegy to John Hogg makes reference to theology students' clothing:

Sin' Pauly Tam, wi' canker'd snout,
First held the students in about,
To wear their claes as black as soot...

Was "Pauly Tam" Principal Tullideph?

such a course⁷ and, in one of his books, a dull theological argument by John Anderson entitled A Defence of the Church Government...of the Presbyterians, Fergusson inscribed after his name "Student of Divinity."⁸

A theological student underwent a more or less regular arts curriculum for four years. The sessions each year were seven months in length, beginning 21 October and ending in mid-May. It was steady going throughout that time for there were very few holidays.⁹ At the completion of these four years, the student usually went on to St. Mary's College for a time, but Fergusson never did this.

In his first, or bejant,¹ year, Fergusson concentrated on Latin and Greek under the tutelage of Professor Walter Wilson.² The lectures he attended were in Latin. It is possible

7. Ruddiman (as in Dickens, Bruce, ed., Scots Poems by Robert Fergusson, Edinburgh 1925), p. vii; Sommers, p. 10; Irving, p. 5; [Gleig, George], "Fergusson (Robert)," Supplement to the Third Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Edinburgh 1801), v. I, p. 647.

8. Irving, p. 6. Another of his books was Charles Gildon's Deist's Manual, which is now in the possession of Dr. Allan H. MacLaine of Texas Christian University (see Bibliography).

9. Smith, Sydney Goodsir, ed., Robert Fergusson 1750-1774 (Edinburgh 1952), p. 80.

1. Not derived from the French bec-jaune, 'a fledgeling.'

2. Grosart (Works, p. 1) writes that he owned Fergusson's copy of Anabasis, that printed by Foulis in 1744.

that in his first year he was also taught by Alexander Morton, the Professor of Humanity. While the Latin and Greek would continue through all four years, he would be taking other courses also. The semi[-bejant], or second year, would be devoted to Mathematics and Philosophy. Nicholas Vilant,³ who succeeded David Gregory in the University's independent Mathematics department in 1764, drummed a widespread hodge-podge of knowledge into his students: "Euclid's Elements, plain Trigonometry, practical Geometry, Navigation, Algebra, spherical Trigonometry, Conic Sections, Fluxions, Astronomy, with the Projection of the Sphere, and Doctrines of Eclipses, Fortification, &c. &c."⁴ This was a two-year course. Fergusson, according to Gleig, was "the first mathematician of his standing."⁵ The course of lectures in Philosophy, given by Robert Watson,⁶ included Logic, Rhetoric, and Metaphysics, all with heavy Lockean-Newtonian leanings.⁷ Along with the second half of Vilant's all-in-one

3. He had graduated from St. Andrews in 1753 (Anderson, ed., Matriculation Roll of the University of St. Andrews 1747-1897).
4. Courant, 18 October 1766.
5. Gleig, p. 647.
6. Author of History of the Reign of Philip II. of Spain which appears to have been the great accomplishment of his life. There were several editions of it.
7. At the National Library of Scotland is Watson's manuscript book of his philosophy (MS. 3125, f. 30). It is a brief version of Locke in the light of Newton's theories.

of lectures on the principles of eloquence and poetry, and offering, Robert studied Moral Philosophy under John Young ("Professor of Ethics and Pneumatics"⁸) in his tertian year. As a magistrand, in his final year, he came directly under one of the major influences in his life, Professor William Wilkie. A noted agricultural experimenter, Wilkie was probably best known as the author of The Epigoniad (1757), for which David Hume designated him "the Scottish Homer." During the year Fergusson studied with him, Wilkie published a collection of fables, one of which was in Scots.⁹ The influence of that Scots fable on Fergusson's dialect work has been over-emphasized, but as a friend and a poet of some contemporary standing, the eccentric and slovenly old teacher doubtless made an impression. It is likely that, in his fourth year, Fergusson took "a course

8. Cant, p. 89. Smith, S. G., Robert Fergusson, p. 81.

9. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 64: "Since the text was written I have found among the Laing MSS. in the University of Edinburgh certain papers of Wilkie, and lo! his one vernacular poem, the fable of the 'Partan and the Hare' I at once detected to be in Fergusson's well-known handwriting...The racy footnotes I believe to have been also inspired by him." La. II 327 contains the piece in question. And lo! it is not at all in Fergusson's script, which has definite distinguishing qualities. The Fables were published 2 April 1768 in Edinburgh and London (Courant, 2 April 1768). The Scots fable was reprinted in The Caledonian Mercury, 20 April 1768.

knowledge or enquiry made as to their abilities." (The Edinburgh Advertiser, 10-15 September 1773.)

3. See Appendix E.

of Lectures on the principles of eloquence and poetry, and other branches of the belles lettres; designed chiefly for the elder students of philosophy, and the students of divinity."¹ These lectures were given by Watson.

Fergusson duly completed these studies in May 1768. He did not, however, take a degree, since the practice of giving them had lapsed for some time.²

The year-to-year program gives us no full idea of Fergusson's university career. We must be a little more specific and seek him out in the day-to-day activities of eighteenth century St. Andrews students. He was, we remember, the recipient of a bursary to the amount of £10 a year,³ which placed him in the lowest category of students, the terners or bursars; the gentry were seconders and the noblemen primers. The favors of the University were bestowed or withheld according to the category to which the student belonged. There were, among other things, separate dining facilities, but since the college table was shocking generally, without any regard to social

1. Courant, 15 October 1760.

2. McDiarmid, p. 20. At any rate, the degree meant very little: "It is a common thing...for persons in England to write to St Andrews for degrees, which they get sent by post, upon paying the fees, without the smallest knowledge or enquiry made as to their abilities." (The Edinburgh Advertiser, 10-16 September 1773.)

3. See Appendix E.

Gent, p. 96.

level, a student would live and board out if it were at all within his ability to do so. At first Robert did that; it was probably the matter of finances which compelled him, after his first year, to live at the College, where his room was free, though he paid at the rate of £8 sterling a year for his board.⁴ (In addition, he had to pay a guinea and a half to each of his professors, which would imply that his father found it necessary to supplement the bursary.)

When we read of the Scottish students of old who migrated southward with a sack of meal on their backs to starve to death at Oxford, or when we think of the Meal Mondays, still observed, which are a relic of Scottish university life of the past, we get an inkling of the austere existence a Scot was willing to undergo for the sake of an education. But, luxury-conscious individuals that we are today, we probably do not understand it. For instance, it is difficult to comprehend the discomforts Fergusson labored under in his eight-foot square college room:

...the conditions were spartan in the extreme. The students lived together two in a room. The college supplied the barest minimum of furniture--a box bed, a table, and little else. Fires were provided, but as they smoked abominably, the more general practice was to wrap oneself in plaid and gloves against the cold.⁵

4. Courant, 6 October 1766.

5. Cant, p. 96.

George Bruce had seen the very room in which Fergusson had lived, with his name written there; it is a pity that he did not describe it in detail.⁶

The day's schedule would seem "spartan in the extreme" to us, and yet it probably was quite normal to Fergusson.

There was the Hebdomadar, or surveillant--each professor took a weekly turn at this disciplinary post unless he could devise a stratagem to avoid it--who came around at five every morning, a torch-bearing student at his heels, to "perlustrate" the rooms of the students.⁷ The ternars then would rise and go

down to the janitor's pantry to fetch their breakfasts, oatmeal scones and mutchkins of ale which had been brewed by the College porter.⁸

If the perlustration of the sun were adequate in the early hours, there would be a little time for study before classes, which began at eight. Classes, at least in the first years, were probably much in the same tradition which Fergusson had already undergone, translation and/or repetition. Dinner

6. [Bruce, George], To the Memory of Robert Fergusson (Dundee 1898), p. 6: "...I remember 64 years ago of seeing Fergusson's name written by himself in the room where he lodged before the janitor's house and buildings where the students lodged were pulled down--the room being turned into a dovecot by one of the sons of old Tommy Peattie, who succeeded John [Hogg], the janitor in Fergusson's time..."

7. Cant, p. 81. Smith, S. G., Robert Fergusson, p. 80.

8. Smith, S. G., Robert Fergusson, p. 80.

was at noon in the College Hall, and it was prefaced with a grace by the Hebdomadar and concluded with a scripture reading by a bursar.⁹ Afternoon classes were followed by supper which, like breakfast, was carried by each student to his room. For the purposes of consuming these poor feasts, the student provided his own knife and fork, unless he were using---at a high rental---one of the silver spoons belonging to the College.¹ The Hebdomadar saw, as well as he could, that all of his charges were in their rooms by eight in the evening; normally he probably had a minimum of trouble if the students wanted to take advantage of the little daylight left after supper to prepare the next day's lessons. He closed the College gates at ten.

In the words, "sae blyth, sae daft," Fergusson was obviously not referring to that routine. He was thinking of the light-hearted pranks which are a part of everyone's student days. And of his own student days some well-substantiated incidents are preserved. He had a genius for mischief, and from Campbell's biography onward, the tales of it multiply.

9. Cant, p. 96.

1. Ibid.

My lamented friend Dr. Charles Webster, whom I have mentioned in a former page, and he were fellow students at both universities.² St Andrews was the scene of their juvenile frolics; and many a prank have I heard him relate of our poet and himself, with all that glow of fancy and description, for which he was so eminently qualified. A circumstance of this sort had very nearly proved of serious consequences to the academic reputation of young Fergusson. He was considered the best singer at the university, of consequence, he was oftener than he inclined, requested to officiate as clerk at morning and evening prayers. In order to get quit of this drudgery, he meditated the following scheme. It is usual, according to the Scottish mode of Presbyterian worship, to mention the names of persons, who are recommended in prayer; our poet, who, as usual, was in the precentor's desk, rose up with great composure, and with an audible voice, as if reading from a paper he held in his hand, said "Remember in prayer----a young man, (who was in the hall at the very instant) who, from the sudden effects of inebriety, there appears but small hope of recovery." This, as might be expected, threw the whole students into a sudden fit of laughter. The professors wist not what to do, and the assembly, in no wise disposed to prayer, broke up, and dismissed in peals of convulsive merriment. This indecorous behaviour had nearly cost young Fergusson his gown; and had not Dr Wilkie (the ingenious author of the Epigoniad) stepped in between him and the displeasure of the rest of the professors, it may easily be conjectured what would have been the consequences.³

2. Campbell thought that Fergusson had attended Edinburgh University. He made this mistake because he had seen either in the Matriculation Roll of 1765 of Edinburgh University (in the University Library), or in the class book of Professor William Wallace (also in the University Library), the name "Robert Ferguson." But neither the orthography nor script is that of the poet. This other Robert Ferguson was the son of Charles Ferguson of Galloway. It is the same Ferguson who was made a notary "gratis" on 10 March 1770 (La. III B43, List of Persons who took the usual Oaths to Government [this in Laing's hand]). Mr. C. T. MacInnes, at the Register House, was able to make this identification for me from the Notary Records. The error which Campbell made actually attests to the thoroughness of his search for materials, though one might expect him to have known Fergusson's script.

3. Campbell, p. 291.

It was not this particular incident which involved Fergusson in trouble with Principal Tullideph. When the reckoning came, however, his misdemeanor at prayers was counted in. The other incident occurred at the time the Chancellor, the Earl of Kinnoul, distributed scholarship prizes. Some of the students who had not received prizes attacked those who had, and Robert was one of the attackers.

The Principal dictated the punishment: expulsion without hope of reinstatement. In the Laing Manuscripts (La. II 334/6) at Edinburgh University is a transcription by John Lee from the now lost notebooks of Tullideph:⁴

26 Mart. 1768.

I extruded Alexr Grant sine spe redeundi on account of a continued Course of irregularity for some weeks past-- particularly for a Riot committed with some accomplices on Lewis Grant about one o'clock of the morning of this 26th of March.

And also extruded Rot. Ferguson, and Charles Stewart his accomplices in that Riot, Rot. Ferguson likewise had

4. National Library Lee MSS. 3460: "At the death of the widow of Mr Tullideph of Kilmeny son of the Revd Thos Tullideph...of the United Coll. of St. Ands, a great number of vols of MSS were given to T D Buist...of St Andrews." Buist handed these over to Principal Lee, who desired to make some extracts. The transcription mentioned above is in the hand of Lee, and McDiarmid (p. 17) errs in saying that it is a part of Tullideph's notebooks. Grosart seems actually to have had access to the notebooks themselves, for he mentions the dates on which they begin and end.

wantonly given up John Adamson's Name to be prayed for.

I deprived John Adamson of his Server's place⁵ for being out twice all night, & for imposing on the Hebdomadar by a false Praetext to get to the Dancing School⁶ another Night.

It all ended happily, as Campbell says, and Tullideph's postscript closed the affair: "N. B. 30th March 1768, Rot Ferguson & Charles Stewart were received in again at a meeting of the Masters.--"⁷

It seems reasonable to trust Campbell when he says that it was Wilkie who helped Fergusson out of the scrape, for the two seem to have been very good friends. At some previous time, the professor had employed his student for two summers at copying his lectures⁸ and he had, on various occasions, invited him to his farm. Fergusson retained a love and admiration for him which is best shown in the eclogue to his memory which he wrote when Wilkie died in 1772.⁹

5. i.e., he had been working at serving meals at the College.

6. The dancing school in St. Andrews, where dances were held and plays performed (Bennet, A., Robert Fergusson, An Eighteenth Century St. Andrews Student, Reprinted from the St. Andrews Citizen [n.d.], p. 55).

7. Irving thought that Fergusson had actually been expelled at that time, but Inverarity produced a letter from Vilant to refute him. It is to be found in Appendix F.

8. Scots Magazine, November 1801.

9. Courant, 17 October 1772: "The Rev. Dr. William Wilkie, Professor of Natural Philosophy in the university of St Andrews, and author of the Epigoniad, died at St Andrews on Friday the ninth current."

The Edinburgh Literary Journal (March 1811).

Chambers tells us that:

While at college, the young poet used to put in practice a frolic which marks the singular vivacity of his character. Whenever he received a remittance from his friends at Edinburgh, he hung out the money in a little bag attached by a string to the end of a pole fixed in his window; and there he would let it dangle for a whole day in the wind. He is supposed to have done this partly from puerile exultation in the possession of his wealth, and partly by way of making a bravado in the eyes of his companions; among whom, no doubt, the slenderness of their funds and the failure of supplies, would be frequent subjects of raillery.¹

A rather odd quirk; we can only take Fergusson's youth into consideration.

One of his classmates at St. Andrews was James Brown (later the Reverend Doctor).² One holiday, Fergusson and Brown were walking in the country, hiking being one of the poet's favorite pastimes. Coming upon a farmhouse, they entered it and there found a young shepherd who was quite ill and being cared for by a farm woman. In feigned seriousness, Fergusson announced that he was a physician and, having made a convincing mock examination, prescribed treatment. While Brown admired his friend's theatrical ability, he nevertheless reprimanded his ridiculous and dangerous foolery, as well he should have.³

1. Chambers, Robert, Lives of Illustrious and Distinguished Scotsmen (Glasgow 1832-1835), v. II, p. 299.
2. Who later lived in London and who published some poetry.
3. [Tennent, William], "Anecdotes of Ferguson [sic], Burns, and his schoolfellows" By the Author of "Anster Fair," The Edinburgh Literary Journal (Edinburgh, 31 December 1831).

Finally, an anecdote is related by Charles Rogers, whose father had gotten the story through St. Andrews tradition. The bursars were required to give the grace at mealtimes,⁴ and one day, after a tedious and seemingly eternal diet of rabbits, Robert's turn came about. He recited the following poetic grace:

For rabbits young and for rabbits old,
For rabbits hot and for rabbits cold,
For rabbits tender and for rabbits tough,
L--d, we thank thee, for we've had enough.

There was resultant displeasure among the professors, but the rabbit diet was discontinued.⁵ The corroboration for this story is a little weak, though from all we know, Fergusson was certainly the person to devise such an aggressive joke. Anecdotes of his pranks seem to have been preserved quite eagerly, while other first-hand traces of his life have all but disappeared. Unfortunately, the anecdotes give but a one-sided picture of his character and personality. We should like to search a little more deeply into his heart. A few words of the College porter are really the most revealing. When asked about Fergusson by James Inverarity, the porter answered:

4. Cant (p. 96) assigns the task to the Hebdomadar.
5. Rogers, Charles, A Century of Scottish Life (Edinburgh 1871), pp. 45 f. Fairley (Bibliography, p. 7) reprints a poem from The Edinburgh Advertiser, which contains four lines similar to those above, and suggests that it may have been Fergusson's. This poem is given in Appendix G.



"Rob Fergusson! Did I ken him? Ay, weel I did. I've aften pitten him tae the door. He was a tricky callant, but a fine laddie for a' that."⁶

But this story seems unreliable in that the names of Cobb and Mudie are not to be found on the College records.

We already have seen a schoolboy poem of Fergusson's, one which displayed an acquaintance with Scots dialect poetry and with the poetry of Allan Ramsay in particular. The literary influences he met at St. Andrews--Wilkie and Watson--have been mentioned. Some time in his boyhood he had acquired a desire for literary achievement and now he was working hard at his poetry. "Every day produced something new," writes Sommers, "the offspring of his fertile pen, which was frequently employed in satyrizing the foibles of the professors, and of his fellow students."⁷ A remaining hint of the satire of his fellows are lines which he is said to have inscribed on the door of two rather unintelligent students from Forfarshire who had offended him:

Jamie Cobb and Will Mudie
Left the plough and came to study.

Having discovered these lines on their door, the two went to complain to the Hebdomadar; meanwhile Fergusson completed his

6. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 59.

7. Sommers, p. 11.

8. Rogers, p. 11.

9. Gregory, p. 11.

quatrain:

Will Mudie and Jamie Cobb
Never tried a worse job.⁸

But this story seems unreliable in that the names of Cobb and Mudie are not to be found on the College records.

The only substantial piece of Robert's early poetry which has survived is the Elegy on the Death of Mr. David Gregory. The subject of the Elegy was the Professor of Mathematics at St. Andrews from 1739 to 1764; he died 13 April 1765.⁹ Fergusson never encountered him in the classroom, but probably he had seen him about St. Andrews and had heard of him through older students. At first glance, the comic elegy seems less than fair to Gregory's known abilities and appears to exhibit a horrifying poor taste, but let us remember the professor was merely supplying a topic for some accomplished juvenile wit. Here are five of its seven stanzas:

Now mourn, ye college masters a'!
And frae your ein a tear lat fa',
Fam'd Gregory death has taen awa'
Without remeid;
The skaith ye've met wi's nae that sma',
Sin Gregory's dead.
The students too will miss him sair,
To school them weel his eident care,
Now they may mourn for ever mair,
They hae great need;
They'll hip the maist fek o' their lear,
Sin Gregory's dead.

8. Rogers, pp. 45 f.

9. Gregory MSS. at St. Andrews University.

He could, by Euclid, prove lang sine
 A ganging point compos'd a line;
 By numbers too he cou'd divine,
 Whan he did read,
 That three times three just made up nine;
 But now he's dead.

Sae weel's he'd fley the students a',
 Whan they war skelpin at the ba',
 They took leg bail and ran awa',
 Wi' pith and speid;
 We winna get a sport sae braw
 Sin Gregory's dead.

Great 'casion hae we a' to weep,
 An' cleed our skins in mourning deep,
 For Gregory death will fairly keep
 To take his nap;
 He'll till the resurrection sleep
 As sound's a tap.

This "Scots elegiac" form is traditional and usually consists of (1) an invocation to mourn; (2) the designation of those who will grieve; (3) the qualities of the deceased; (4) and a farewell which is a reconciliation to the fact of the loss. It is based upon Robert Sempill's elegy, The Life and Death of...Habbie Simson (c. 1649), which had appeared in James Watson's Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems (Edinburgh 1706-1711). Allan Ramsay, who wrote several Scots elegies, assigned the name "standard Habbie" to the stanza used in Sempill's elegy. (The assignment, however, is rather misleading as to origin, because that same stanza appears in Medieval Latin poetry as well as in very early Scots poetry in the Makcullock

Manuscripts.¹ The "remeid...deid" rhyme had been taken from The Gude and Godlie Ballatis.²) The fact that Scottish poets adopted "standard Habbie" so readily is accounted for by its ability to punctuate an anti-climax, the soul of a great deal of Scots poetry. Fergusson's use of it emphasizes his familiarity with the elegies of Ramsay and of Sempill.

At first it seems impossible to believe that Fergusson wrote the Elegy at the age of fifteen, and yet he probably did. Gregory having died in 1765, the subject was topical at that time and topical poems are not usually written very long after the event they celebrate. The poem itself does not compare favorably with his more mature work of later years. In his later work he was normally original, and there is less originality in this poem than in almost all of his other vernacular work.³ He follows the Habbie Simson "dead" rhyme in nearly every stanza and his next to the last stanza is

He counted was a well'd wight-man,
And fiarsely at Foot-ball he ran;

1. MacLaine, Allan H., "New Light on the Genesis of the Burns Stanza," Notes and Queries, August 1953.
2. Ibid.
3. MacLaine, Allan H., Robert Fergusson: A Critical Study, Thesis Submitted...at Brown University (MS.), April 1951, pp. 114, 115. There is a microfilm copy of this at the Edinburgh University Library.

which caused Fergusson to desert the project as Caladon's Tears: or, Wallace, A Tragedy containing the Gallant War of Scotland, from the Death of King Alexander III. to betraying and butchering of that faithful Father of his Country, Sir William Wallace of Elderslie Collected from Chronological Records by G. Macriell. Nisbet 1813... (Edinburgh M80CXXIII). It seems that Fergusson might easily have surpassed that much footnoted and declaratory play.

certainly lifted from Sempill.⁴ Other of his rhymes are also from Sempill, as well as from Ramsay.⁵ Only Fergusson himself wrote a better Scots elegy, but the Elegy to Gregory is nevertheless a juvenile piece of work.

While Fergusson was at St. Andrews he must have produced many works of this type and of this quality. A few of the pieces which he printed in the 1770's probably originated at this time. He bound himself to a thorough apprenticeship. We know that during his last session at the University he developed an enthusiasm for the drama and he began to write a tragedy based upon the life of Sir William Wallace; he abandoned it when he discovered that another play had already been written upon the subject, "because (said he to a friend) whatever I publish shall be original, and this tragedy might be considered as a copy."⁶ Because of the theme chosen,

4. He counted was a weil'd wight-man,
And fiercely at Foot-ball he ran:
At every game the gree he wan,
For pith and speed.
The like of Habbie was no than,
But now he's dead.

5. Ramsay's Elegy on Maggy Johnston: "...I took a Nap...
As sound's a Tap."

6. Gleig, p. 647. McDiarmid (p. 19) identifies the tragedy which caused Fergusson to desert the project as Caledon's Tears: or, Wallace, A Tragedy containing the Calamities of Scotland, from the Death of King Alexander III. to betraying and butchering of that faithful Father of his Country, Sir William Wallace of Elderslie Collected from Chronological Records by G[abriel]. Nisbit [sic]... (Edinburgh MDCCXXXIII). It seems that Fergusson might easily have surpassed that much footnoted and declamatory play.

Peterkin has called Fergusson a "rank jacobite," which is ridiculous.⁷ Irving mentions another of Fergusson's attempts at dramatic writing, he having found some speeches written in the poet's hand on the blank leaves of his copy of A Defence of the Church Government.⁸

* * *

It is difficult to know what Fergusson's scholastic standing was throughout his school years. Sommers thought that he was no great scholar, having "an aversion to the more confined and perhaps necessary restraints..."⁹ "With respect to his erudition, it could not well be supposed to have been very extensive."¹ On the other hand, there is the opposing statement: "His classical attainments were respectable, but for the austerer branches of scholastic and scientific knowledge he always expressed, with the petulance of a youth of lively parts, who did not wish to be subjected to the labour of hard study, a decided contempt."² His capacity for

7. Peterkin, p. 21. While loving his homeland with an understandable pride and profoundness, Fergusson saw nothing wrong in praising Lord Provost Drummond, a "rank anti-jacobite," in his poem Auld Reikie.

8. Irving, pp. 5, 6. Irving quotes several lines of this.

9. Sommers, p. 11.

1. p. 44.

2. Chambers, p. 297.

learned argument will be shown later. For the time being, I think we can say that Fergusson was well-grounded in those subjects of which he was supposed to be master: Latin and Greek and their literatures, and traditional British philosophy. Beyond that, his work shows a wide acquaintance with English literature quite unusual in his day.

His school days were over in the spring of 1768. William Fergusson had died the year before and, had Fergusson had any inclination to complete his study for the church, the possibilities of doing so were now very slender.

William Fergusson had been active as late as February 1767,³ and his death in mid-May must have been quite unexpected. There are two records bearing upon his death, that of his interment:

Ferguson 17 [May 1767] William Ferguson Writer in Edinr
outside of Hays burying place, aged 53 years,
died of an asthma.⁴

3. At that time he was serving as factor to Dr. James Walker in addition, supposedly, to his regular employment.
4. Parochial Register of the Canongate, Register House, Edinburgh. Burials took place as long as a week after death. Hay's burial place was twelfth along the west wall of the churchyard ("List of all the purchased Burial places in the Kirk yard of the Canongate," attached to the volume mentioned above), and the Fergussons owned a plot to the east of it.

and that of the mort cloth rental:

Mort Cloaths...

17 [May] William Ferguson

-7[s]-⁵

To Hary Fergusson fell the lot of supporting the family and probably of helping to keep his brother at the University for another year.

The project by which he sought to bring bread to his mother and his sister is an example of his nature: a fencing school. Having deserted his apprenticeship about 1760, he eventually qualified as a fencing master and later wrote a very literary, though unsuccessful, book on the subject, A Dictionary Explaining the Terms, Guards, and Positions, used in the Art of the Small Sword ([Edinburgh] 1767).¹ Obviously there was room enough and patience enough in the Fergusson household for the tuition of his students and the slattering of their small swords:

FENCING

MR. FERGUSON continues to teach the art of the Small Sword, for the ensuing Season, at his Hall in Warrinton's-close. He expects, therefore, that the gentlemen belonging to the town and University, will encourage his undertaking, and

5. Canongate Kirk Treasurer's Accounts 1754-1768 at Tolbooth St. John's Church in Edinburgh. The mort cloth was used to cover the coffin at the funeral. Seven shillings--equivalent at least to £7 today--was three times what was usually paid, a good indication of the financial standing of the family.

1. The only copy I have been able to find is in the Library of Scotland.
2. Courant, 25 November 1767. This may have appeared first with M. Picard in Don's Close (Courant, 17 December 1767) or with John Addison.

CHAPTER FOUR

Hary Fergusson, if somewhat unreliable, was nevertheless capable and venturesome. Whereas Robert was a reflective person, his elder brother entered into the more robust aspects of life with, we suspect, a maximum of faith and optimism. The project by which he sought to bring bread to his mother and his sister is an example of his nature: a fencing school. Having deserted his apprenticeship about 1760, he eventually qualified as a fencing master and later wrote a very literate, though unsuccessful, book on the subject, A Dictionary Explaining the Terms, Guards, and Positions, used in the Art of the Small Sword ([Edinburgh] 1767).¹ Obviously there was room enough and patience enough in the Fergusson household for the tuition of his students and the clattering of their small swords:

FENCING

MR. FERGUSON continues to teach the Art of the SMALL SWORD, for the ensuing Season, at his Hall in Warriston's-close. He expects, therefore, that the gentlemen belonging to the town and University, will encourage his undertaking; and, in particular, that those who are already acquainted with the principles of this art will continue to practice them.

As to his own abilities, it would be improper to say anything concerning them in this place, he chuses rather to submit to the judgment of the impartial Spectator.²

1. The only copy I have been able to find is in the National Library of Scotland.
2. Courant, 25 November 1767. Hary may have studied fencing with M. Picard in Don's Close (Courant, 19 November 1760) or with John Addison.

"The gentlemen belonging to the town and University" did not encourage Hary; they did not live up to promises to patronize his school nor did they always pay their bills.³ In 1768 he entered the Navy.

It must have been in consequence of Hary's being unable to pay the rent that Mrs. Fergusson and Margaret now moved to Jamieson's Land, Bell's Wynd, on the south side of the High Street. If Fergusson's line in Auld Reikie, "And shake my garret wi' their cry...", is anything more than poetry,⁴ he returned to a house (flat) of two storeys, "the first floor consisting of a dineing [sic] room, two other rooms, and kitchen, and the garret story of three rooms..."⁵ Or, if that were not his new home, it would have been of that order.

To Robert, returning from the university lacking complete qualifications for any profession, a poorer household was the least of his problems. It was not importunate that he go to work immediately, but something would have to be found soon, something which would suit his half-trained abilities and which would promise some eventual reward. He himself looked at the

3. See Appendix H, letter 1.

4. A line from Philips' The Splendid Shilling seems, however, to have been the source for that verse.

5. Advertiser, 4-7 February 1772.

matter with eighteen-year-old indecision and lack of realism: what he wanted was a sinecure that would leave him time enough for his poetry.⁶ It was natural that he should turn to his uncle; a great deal depended upon patronage in the eighteenth century. About mid-1768 he trekked north to Aberdeenshire to visit John Forbes.⁷ Despite the romantic boiling of a number of his biographers, I am not of the opinion that Robert was faultless in what occurred there or that the whole episode reflects much credit on him at that period.

He stayed six long months with Forbes.⁸ It is not unlikely that during this time Forbes was taking measures to see what could be done for him--he had attempted that much for William Fergusson in the past--but his employer, Lord Findlater, did not enjoy an unlimited patronage; openings were not that abundant. Lingering about for six months was probably not so hard on Fergusson as it was on his uncle: that the visit terminated in an outburst of Forbes' temper begins to be

6. Gleig, p. 647.

7. According to Grosart (Works, p. lxviii) the date would be early 1769, but Grosart thought Fergusson left St. Andrews in November 1768, and thus his error. Since the poet wrote songs for Tenducci's production of The Royal Shepherd in January 1769, I assume he had by then already returned to Edinburgh.

8. Irving, p. 7. The farm house of Round Lichnot still stands.

understandable.

The disagreeable incident occurred when Forbes had invited both of his employers, Lord Findlater and Mr. Urquhart, to dine at Round Lichnot. The primary purpose of the invitation was that the two men, not having met previously, should become acquainted with one another; but Fergusson's uncle, desiring to make the most of the opportunity, also arranged that his nephew, as well as his own sons, should be presented to the nobleman. Accordingly, he instructed them to dress for the occasion. While waiting for the three men to finish dining, Fergusson found "the intervening hours hang heavily on his hands" and, in order to divert himself, he went to the Wood of Lichnot. He returned just in time to be presented, but not in time enough to clean his now very soiled clothing. Seeing him appear thus, his uncle "to a certain extent" became angry "and sharply ordered Fergusson out of the room."⁹ The offended boy left not only the room, but the house.

The whole affair was unfortunate. For the uncle it can be said that a six-month visit is a very long one and that his nephew's presence may at times have been rather irksome-- Fergusson used to harangue the servants with sermons which set them weeping.¹ For Fergusson it can be said that he was

9. Grosart, Works, pp. lxviii, lxix.

1. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 72.

young and oversensitive and that the incident grew to unnecessary proportions in his mind, leaving him with convictions that he had been used unjustly. The bitter outcome meant an unending rent in the relations between the two families.

At any rate, Fergusson trudged the long journey homeward. The strain of his exertion was so great that he was ill for several days upon his return. According to his family, as soon as he became well again, he wrote his poems The Decay of Friendship and Against Repining at Fortune.

As much as one might like to justify Fergusson's inactivity between the early part of 1769 and the autumn of 1770, it is difficult to do so. What his mother and his sister were living on is not known;² eventually Hary became a Master-at-Arms with the rank of Warrant Officer, a lucrative post, and perhaps he found it possible to make remittances home. Meanwhile Robert was engaged largely on unremunerative literary projects, and his lack of success should have made him feel some compulsion to obtain employment. He might have taken something temporarily, hoping still for his sinecure: a clerkship, teaching, a minor

2. Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 65), states that Mrs. Fergusson was taking in boarders. He gives no evidence and may have based his statement on the Edinburgh Directories where other Mrs. Fergussons are listed as undertaking this service.

post in the Church. There was an abundance of semi-attractive places.

There is no doubt that he was idle and undecided. If we cannot believe Sommers, who says,

His mother was as kind and attentive to him as her circumscribed residence and scanty means could admit of, yet he became peevish from his unsettled and dependent situation... Week after week, however, passed in this idle and unproductive state...³

then Gleig implies much the same thing:

[He] turned a deaf ear to the intreaties of his mother, and of every friend who endeavoured to persuade him to fulfil his father's intention [that he should go into the Church]. He was then advised to study physic; but he declined it, because, he said, that, when reading the description of diseases, he fancied that he felt the symptoms of all of them in himself.⁴

To continue his studies probably would have been financially impossible, but to settle himself in work certainly was within his capabilities, influence or no influence. And the ultimate fact is that he was unemployed until after the middle of 1770.

How was he using his time, then? For one thing, he was writing, as we have already seen. For another, both before and after the Aberdeenshire visit, he was floating about the

3. Sommers, pp. 21, 22.

4. Gleig, p. 647.

6. Campbell, p. 223.

town making a number of friends. Just when he made certain of his friendships is impossible to ascertain, for only a few of them can be dated. In the 1768-9 period Tenducci can be introduced, however, and with him the first of Fergusson's published writings.

The Fergussons had some acquaintance with the Musical Society of Edinburgh.⁵ Robert knew John Addison, John Smeiton, Cornforth Gilson, and John Collet, who were connected with the Society, and his singing gave him some affinity to these people. In 1768 Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci joined the Society, and within the year and a half he was in Edinburgh a strong friendship with Fergusson developed. Campbell recalled that "six years after his [Fergusson's] decease, TENDUCCI, with whom I was then a pupil, talking of poor Fergusson, burst into a flood of tears, and repeated his name with the tenderest emotion; indeed he never mentioned him but with the liveliest regret."⁶

The friendship between the two is curious, for Tenducci was not so virile a person as Fergusson might have chosen for a friend. That the singer was a castrato seems amply clear in

7. Advertiser, 3-5 October 1784.

5. See Hary's second letter to Robert (Appendix H) in which John Addison is mentioned.

6. Campbell, p. 298.

the fact that an Edinburgh gentleman owned a "gray gelding Tenducci."⁷ But he was of the same irresponsible and convivial nature as the poet and both were feverishly ambitious in creative fields. Indeed, Fergusson must already have had a reputation as a poet to have been recommended to the singer. Undoubtedly he was intrigued by the peculiarity of this phenomenon, this eunuch, whose lack of English sometimes provided humorous situations:

Sir Robert Myreton of Gogar was the most inveterate swearer in Scotland. He could not speak a sentence without an oath. He was a great lover of music, and when the celebrated Tenducci was brought over to sing at our Edinburgh Concert, he was delighted to be asked to meet him at supper. Tenducci next day mentioning the company, could not recollect Sir Robert's name, but after trying in vain to recollect it, described him as 'il cavaliere che sempre dice Goddam.'⁸

Robert also was flattered by the attentions of one so great, for Tenducci already had captivated the audiences of London and Dublin as few had done before.

Tenducci, who was born in Sienna in 1736, and who had arrived in Great Britain when he was twenty-two years of age, had become known as one of the best singers of his century. The Musical Society wooed him away from the Dublin Theatre.

7. Advertiser, 3-6 October 1769.

8. MacKenzie, p. 3.

with a £150 contract⁹ when he visited Edinburgh on 15 May 1768 to give a concert.¹ Returning to Ireland for his wife--he was married in 1766 to Dorothy Maunsell, an Irish singer--he was back in Edinburgh to direct a concert in July.² The thoroughly undependable but eager Italian undertook a number of projects. The month after his arrival, he started to teach singing,³ eventually establishing an academy.⁴ In April 1769 he published A Collection of Lessons for the Harpsichord or Piano Forte.⁵

But of most direct concern to us are the operas which he produced while in Edinburgh. The first was The Royal Shepherd.⁶

Mr. ROSS has appointed Thursday the 26th instant [January 1769], for the performance of the serious Opera, called

The ROYAL SHEPHERD
 As it is performed by Mr. TENDUCCI,
 Edinburgh: Alexander by Mr. Woodman,
 Agenor by Mr. Phillips,
 Eliza, by Mrs. Arthur,
 Thamyris, by Miss Brown.⁷

9. Musical Society Sederunt Book (MS), Edinburgh Public Library. The Plan Books of the Society are in the Edinburgh University Library.
1. Courant, 16, 21 May 1768.
2. 20 July 1768. He was a month late in returning.
3. 6 August 1768.
4. 21 November 1768.
5. 17 April 1769.
6. Translated from Metastasio's Il re pastore by Richard Rolt; the music was composed by George Rush. Tenducci presented a revised version of it in Dublin in 1765.
7. Caledonian Mercury, 21 January 1769.

This performance was repeated on 8 and 21 March.⁸ In its Edinburgh version, the opera contained fourteen songs which had not appeared previously, and one of them, No repose can I discover, is attributed elsewhere to Fergusson. Though the remaining thirteen songs are rather bad poetry, undoubtedly he wrote (or revised) these also (see Appendix I). Thus January 1769 was his earliest debut on the stage and in print.⁹ Tenducci carried this opera with him to London, producing it at Covent Garden with a number of the songs (including No repose) which had been written for the Edinburgh version.¹

8. Courant, 4 March 1769.

9. The Royal Shepherd an English Opera. with Alterations. As it is performed at the Theatre-Royal, Edinburgh. Edinburgh: Printed by Martin & Wotherspoon. MDCCLXIX [Price Sixpence]. There are two copies in the National Library of Scotland (one uncatalogued but bound with Artaxerxes). This libretto was issued shortly before the opera was performed. The Caledonian Mercury of 18 March 1769 announced a benefit performance of The Royal Shepherd "with the addition of two favourite Scots airs [i.e., the tunes sung with new words] by Mr Tenducci viz. Braes of Balanden, and Lochaber no more." It is significant that several months later Fergusson was to write new words for these very tunes.

1. The name was changed: Amintas, an English Opera As perform'd at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden. (London M.DCC.LXIX.). It was the same as The Royal Shepherd with only minor alterations. The date of performance was December 1769. Editions of Amintas appeared in 1783, 1788, and 1792.

Airs. The Scots
by Martin & Wotherspoon
copy is in the National
Royal Shepherd
and Dublin 1783.

On 10 March 1769 Tenducci performed Pharnaces, or the Revenge of Athridates at St. Cecilia's Hall, probably for the benefit of the Musical Society. Fergusson did not contribute songs to this opera.²

The final opera on which Fergusson collaborated was Arne's Artaxerxes. Tenducci performed it on 31 July and 7 August 1769,³ and the libretto appeared at the same time with Fergusson's name on the title page as the author of three songs which were set to the tunes Roslin Castle, The Braes of Ballandine, and Lochaber No More.⁴

2. Courant, 8 March 1769: "Just Published A New ENGLISH OPERA, Called PHARNACES, or the Revenge of ATHRIDATES, as it is to be performed at St. Cecilia's Hall on Friday next the 10th instant, price 6d. to be got of Mr Tenducci, and at Mr Fleming's shop at the Cross." The performers were members of the Musical Society and Gilson was to have played Athridates, but he took ill before the performance. Mr. Fleming regularly sold tickets for the Musical Society. No mention is made of the opera in the Plan Books.
3. "THEATRE-ROYAL On MONDAY next, the 31st instant, will be performed, For the Benefit of Mr TENDUCCI, the Celebrated Opera of ARTAXERXES. Arbaces, Mr Tenducci, (Who will introduce some favourite Scotch Airs.) Artabanes, Mr PHILLIPS, Artaxerxes, Mr TAYLOR, Rimines, Mrs COLLET, Semira, Miss ALPHEY, and Mandane, by Mrs TAYLOR, (Who will introduce the song Roslin Castle,) (With new Dresses and Decorations,)..." (Courant, 29 July 1769).
4. Artaxerxes. an English Opera As it is performed at the Theatre-Royal, Edinburgh. The Music Composed by Tho. Aug. Arne, Mus. Doc. With the addition of three Favorite Scots Airs. The words by Mr. R. Fergusson. Edinburgh: Printed by Martin & Wotherspoon. MDCCLXIX. [Price Six pence.] A copy is in the National Library of Scotland bound with The Royal Shepherd. The opera was produced in London (1764) and Dublin (1765).

The songs which Fergusson wrote for Tenducci are not worth the slightest critical commentary, but it should be noted that they were very popular in the years that followed the production of the operas. Neil Stewart, an Edinburgh music seller, reprinted No repose, as well as Where winding Forth adorns the vale and Amidst a rosy bank of flowers, in a number of his collections from 1772-3 onwards.⁵ The last two songs and The Rivers of Scotland were probably written specifically for the Musical Society.

Tenducci, deeply in debt and possibly disappointed in the outcome of his opera performances and his academy, ran out on his second contract (of £250) with the Musical Society to seek an engagement in London.⁶ He left his unfortunate wife behind to make the best of things, which she did from November 1769 until January 1770 by assuming his contract obligations.⁷ It was not until 1780 that he returned to Edinburgh for a brief time, staying with his patroness, Lady Hope, and performing once again at St. Cecilia's Hall.

5. See Bibliography. McDiarmid (p. 37) gives the date of publication of the last two songs as 1772, but Stewart's music books are undated and the songs may have been printed by Stewart after the 1773 Poems had appeared.

6. Musical Society Sederunt Book.

7. Ibid.

The friendship had been short, but it had been warm. Besides the service he did to Fergusson's work--and, more important, to his confidence--Tenducci shared with the poet a love for Scottish music. No Scot ever begrudged the Italian the praise due him for his rendering of Scots songs: "Who could hear...without being moved in the greatest degree, Tenducci sing I'll never leave thee, or The braes of Ballendine!---"⁸ Fergusson's tribute to Tenducci is in the poem The Canongate Playhouse in Ruins, probably written near the time he was associating with him:

Such is thy power, O music! such thy fame,
That it has fabled been, how foreign song,
Soft issuing from Tenducci's slender throat,
Has drawn a plaudit from the gods enthron'd
Round the empyreum of Jove himself,
High seated on Olympus' airy top.
Nay, that his fev'rous voice was known to soothe
The shrill-ton'd prating of the females tongues,
Who, in obedience to the lifeless song,
All prostrate fell; all fainting died away
In silent ecstacies of passing joy.

But, for some reason, by October 1773 his praise had turned sour, and in the lines To Sir John Fielding he made an allusion

8. [Tytler, William], "Dissertation on the Scottish Music" in Poetical Remains of James the First, King of Scotland (Edinburgh M,DCC,LXXXIII.), p. 237. MacKenzie (p. 76) agrees: "He sung [Scots songs] in the style suited to that tenderness and simplicity which are the characteristics of the antient Scottish air, without any of those graces or ornaments which are foreign to them..."

which can only be referred to his erstwhile friend. In early eulogizing Gay, he writes that in former days being largely

with the Thy manly voice and Albion's then were heard, member
Felt by her sons, and by her sons rever'd:
along with Eunuchs, not Men, now bear aloft the palm, so was
And o'er our senses pour lethargic balm.

known as an "eminent singer of Scottish song." The director
When he fled to London, had Tenducci deserted Fergusson and
of the Musical Society was Cornforth Gilson, who had come
promises of future commissions, as well as his contract? If
from Durham about 1755. Besides the Friday concerts at which
Fergusson had made extensive revisions for him which were
he, and later his daughters, played and sang regularly, he
used in London without payment or credit, he would have had
taught "the Harriet Hospital Boys the Chorus's...and...the
clear cause for bitterness.

Hary's letter of October 1773 mentions other friends in
to perform..." In 1767, he opened a school in the Canongate.
the Musical Society: "I should be glad to hear of Robertson
Following a salary dispute, he left the Society and was
and Addison's success; the latter, if in Edinb[urgh], I
employed at the Theatre. Among his other accomplishments, he
desire to be kindly remember'd to." (The "success" must
was the author of three books of singing lessons. He, too,
refer to a benefit performance.) Addison appears over a
was a Cape Club member. Ferdinand Arrigoni, who conducted at
long period of time in the accounts of the Musical Society⁹
St. Cecilia's Hall and at the Theatre, was another friend who
as a regular and underpaid employee, eventually discarded
was associated with the Cape Club. John Collet, who came to
because of his age. He had been, Campbell writes, a pupil
Edinburgh before 1769 and who was connected with the Society
of Pepusch, and had served in Edinburgh as a combined fencing
from January 1772, composed music for Fergusson's The Rivers
master--had Hary studied with him?--and music master.¹ A

younger colleague of Addison's was John Smeiton, who performed

3. Campbell, p. 14.

4. Musical Society Sederunt Book.

9. Musical Society Sederunt Book.

1. Campbell, p. 294.

only occasionally at Musical Society concerts.² His yearly income from them was only £2, his engagements being largely with the Canongate Theatre. Later he was a Cape Club member along with Fergusson. He played the guitar and also was known as an "eminent singer of Scottish song."³ The director of the Musical Society was Cornforth Gilson, who had come from Durham about 1756. Besides the Friday concerts at which he, and later his daughters, played and sang regularly, he taught "the Herriot Hospital Boys the Chorus's...and...the gentlemen performers the Chorus's of any oratorio they are to perform..."⁴ In 1767, he opened a school in the Canongate.⁵ Following a salary dispute, he left the Society and was employed at the Theatre. Among his other accomplishments, he was the author of three books of singing lessons. He, too, was a Cape Club member. Ferdinand Arrigoni, who conducted at St. Cecilia's Hall and at the Theatre, was another friend who was associated with the Cape Club. John Collet, who came to Edinburgh before 1769 and who was connected with the Society from January 1772, composed music for Fergusson's The Rivers

2. Musical Society Sederunt Book.

3. Campbell, p. 14.

4. Musical Society Sederunt Book.

5. Courant, 23 May 1767.

of Scotland. An Ode.⁶ Of all the more outstanding friends Fergusson had, he must have become acquainted with most of this group even before he finished the university. His singing, of course, gave him entrance to that circle.

Sommers tells the tale,

Such were his vocal powers, and attachment to Scots songs, that in the course of his convivial frolics, he laid a wager with some of his associates, that if they would furnish him with a certain number of printed ballads, (no matter what kind), he would undertake to dispose of them as a street singer in the course of two hours. The bet was laid; and next evening, being in the month of November, a large bundle of ballads were procured for him. He wrapped himself in a shabby great coat, put on an old scratch wig, and in this disguised form, commenced his adventure at the weigh house, head of the West Bow. In his going down the Lawnmarket, and High Street, he had the address to collect great multitudes around him, while he amused them with a variety of favourite Scots songs, by no means such as he had ballads for, and gained the wager, by disposing of the whole collection. He waited upon his companions by eight o'clock that evening, and spent with them, in mirthful glee, the produce of his street adventure.⁷

That is a bit hard to swallow. The chances are that this story is apocryphal: unlicensed street singing was strictly

6. Grosart, Works, p. 154. Here Grosart says [Richard] Collet composed music for the Ode, but John Collet is the more likely composer. Collet published Six Solos for the violin, with a thorough bass for ye harpsichord, op. 1 (London [1770]), as well as other music. Collet's name appears in the Musical Society Sederunt Books in January 1769 as a substitute performer.

7. Sommers, pp. 27, 28.

8. Maitland, William, The History of Edinburgh from its Foundation to the Present Time (Edinburgh 1804), p. 327.

CHAPTER FIVE

forbidden and its prohibition enforced by the Society of Cadies, those ubiquitous and omniscient porters-pimps-messengers-

About September 8⁷⁰ Fergusson found employment in the detectives of the city. A similar story was related about office of the Commissary Clerk. The Deputy Clerk, Charles Bishop Corbet in Aubrey's Brief Lives; it has been told of Abercromby, was possibly the grandson of a former parish minister in Tarland; that may have been the connection which secured the job for Fergusson. In that office he worked at copying extracts of testaments and at recording decreets of court actions concerning marital disputes. For this he was paid at the rate of a penny farthing a page² (which, if the work were steady, is to be considered good wages).

Arnot describes the functions of the court.

The Commissary Court of Edinburgh has a double jurisdiction, ordinary and universal. Its ordinary jurisdiction extends over its own district; that is, Edinburgh, and the four adjacent counties on the south side of the Forth. Its nature is to confirm testaments, to ascertain debts contracted by persons deceased, and give decrees for payment of them; especially, if the debts relate to the last illness of the deceased, his funeral charges, or obligation arising either from testaments, or from the ties of nature supported by law, requiring alimony out of the effects of the deceased; to decide in all actions

1. See Scott, Haw, ed., Faults Ecclesiastical Scotland (Edinburgh 1915-49), v. VI (1926), p. 114. McIlarnid (p. 22) says he was the son of Andrew Abercrombie, the parish minister of Tarland, but the latter's dates make this quite impossible.
2. See the Memoranda given in Appendix J. The remuneration set against the number of pages copied works out to this figure.

8. Maitland, William, The History of Edinburgh from its Foundation to the Present Time (Edinburgh MDCCLIII), p. 327.

CHAPTER FIVE

About September 1770 Fergusson found employment in the office of the Commissary Clerk. The Deputy Clerk, Charles Abercromby, was possibly the grandson of a former parish minister in Tarland;¹ that may have been the connection which secured the job for Fergusson. In that office he worked at copying extracts of testaments and at recording decreets of court actions concerning marital disputes. For this he was paid at the rate of a penny farthing a page² (which, if the work were steady, is to be considered good wages).

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of scandal; and, in general, upon all debts not exceeding £40. By its universal jurisdiction, it reviews the decrees of other commissary courts, and takes cognizance of all actions to prove a marriage, to procure a divorce, &c.

...There are four judges nominated by the Crown...³

But Topham instills life into these functions, and a long

quotation from his Letters will not be tedious:

...Let us visit, if you please, the Commissary Court, which is situated in a place called the Parliament Close, and which, though it has not the most promising appearance, is still a Court of some business and great importance. It is a little room of about ten feet square, and, from the darkness and dirtiness of it, you would rather imagine that those who were brought into it, were confined there. To this Chamber of Justice you ascend by a narrow, dismal, winding stair-case, and where you are in danger of falling every step you take...

...Their powers are still very extensive, and their abilities very great: though, to speak the truth, they have occasion for them all; for, as Scrub says, "they have a power of business upon their hands." All those ladies who want husbands, and who can no longer do without them, set forth their necessities in the prettiest manner possible, and are relieved. All those ladies too, who are tired of the husbands they have already got, and are very desirous of getting quit of them in a decent manner, mention their wants, and are relieved likewise.--Nothing can come amiss to so much Justice.--The Commissaries know the wants of the ladies, and satisfy them all in the most obliging manner.

But it is not to these instances alone their attention is confined:--they fulfil and interpret the last wills and testaments of the Dead. The desires of the Living are easily known and satisfied; but the intentions of those who are gone are not soon discovered: but that is nothing; for the Commissaries know every thing.

4. Topham, Edward, Letters from Edinburgh, 1779, p. 491.

3. Arnot, Hugo, The History of Edinburgh (Edinburgh 1779), p. 491.

Edinburgh: Register of Parliament, 1779, p. 491.
Record Society, Edinburgh 1871.

In all the trials which come before this Court, the evidences there given, are taken down in writing, which is not only very tedious, but unnecessary; for, properly, every Court ought to hear the witnesses themselves. Every witness does not literally speak the truth, but his countenance always does...

The gentlemen who officiate in the Commissary Court are styled Proctors, and are in general very ignorant of every thing but their business. The Advocates do not plead in this Court; they sometimes give in Memorials like the Procurateurs in the French courts; and it is on the ingenuity of these that the cause frequently turns. These Memorials are intended, it is said, to "elucidate justice;"--by which is meant each party makes it out in his own favour.

But what will surprise you most in this Court is, that the Judges are paid their salaries from the causes which come under their hands...⁴

To support my contention that Fergusson started at the Commissary Office in the autumn of 1770, it will be necessary to refer the reader to the list of Memoranda (Appendix J) which Grosart found written by the poet in the blank leaves of his father's Book of Rates. The best proofs of the authenticity of the Memoranda list are that Grosart himself did not recognize its significance (since he misdated Fergusson's commencement at the Commissary Office) and that all of the Commissary papers listed there can be substantiated.⁵

4. Topham, Edward, Letters from Edinburgh Written in the Years 1774 and 1775 (London M.DCC.LXXVI.), pp. 299-308.
5. See Grant, Francis J., ed., The Commissariat Record of Edinburgh. Register of Testaments, Part III (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh 1899).

The first legal documents on the list, the decreets, are in the Register House in the Record of Consistorial Processes, volumes XI and XII. They are the only Commissary papers irrefutably in Fergusson's hand and the earliest date on any one of them is 10 September 1766, "Chalmers against Marr,"⁶ (fifth on the list). But that date has no bearing on the actual date of transcription, for the first document on the Memoranda is dated 27 July 1770. Thus it readily can be seen that they were copied out of chronological order. When were they copied? Obviously it must have been after July 1770. For these five decreets Fergusson sets down the price of thirteen shillings, paid to him, it will be noticed, after the date 18 October 1770. (The payment must have been for these

6. McDiarmid (p. 23) is wrong on the dates he sets. The Register of Testaments of 1767 is not in Fergusson's hand, but in the hand of a long-experienced scribe who still appears in the Register after Fergusson's death, as does also the scribe (yet another) of the 30 December 1773 Testament, whom he also says is Fergusson. None of McDiarmid's conclusions on handwriting can be accepted. My investigations and conclusions are based on comparison with documents known to be in Fergusson's hand. Mr. C. T. McInnes of the Register House was an expert advisor in these matters in particular and on matters concerning a copyist's work in general.

countryman from Aberdeenshire. Shortly afterwards, however, he was transferred to the position of extraction clerk, and

7. Paterson (p. 30) confirms this as do the Memoranda.

decreets, because Fergusson had not added the thirteen shillings into his Section III and because there are no other Commissary records before 1770 in his hand.) Since it would take him about two weeks to copy all of the foregoing papers and since he probably would not have had to wait more than another two weeks for payment, he must have copied the first of them about September 1770.

The assumption must be made that Fergusson recorded all his initial work at the Commissary Office on this list. His hand is seen nowhere else on earlier records. And if the assumption is accepted, it must be admitted that Fergusson started work about September 1770.

The foregoing thesis has been complicated, but it serves to familiarize the reader with materials which can tell him something about Fergusson's employment. He will see that the first task assigned the young man was a very important one, the transcription of the record, usually entrusted only to a skilled copyist: Fergusson's hand was a good one, though untrained. Abercromby's willingness to use him for this work may have been a manifestation of friendliness for a fellow countryman from Aberdeenshire. Shortly afterwards, however, he was transferred to the position of extraction clerk,⁷ and

7. Peterkin (p. 30) confirms this, as do the Memoranda.

his duties comprised the making of extracts of testaments to be handed to the clients of the Court. For the first task he was paid by Abercromby from the Clerk-Depute's yearly allowance of £100; for the last task, he was paid by the clients themselves. Although tedious, the work was fairly well-paid. But since the item of latest date on the Memoranda (the testament of Alexander Veitch) was recorded on 16 May 1771,⁸ and thus his list represents nine months of work, he cannot have been given a great deal of copying to do at first. There may have been extra work done on Abercromby's private account⁹ (though it is not set down with the other outside tasks on the Memoranda as one would expect). Sommers takes the view that Fergusson's copying was performed only "occasionally," and he may be right.¹ The Commissary Office was just above Sommers' glazier and printselling shop.

There is one further note to be made about the Commissary Records. Fergusson appears to have written the Record of Testaments from January to June 1772.²

8. Register of Testaments at the Register House.

9. Grosart, Works, pp. lxxii, lxxiii.

1. Sommers, p. 28.

2. Mr. McInnes disagrees with my identification here and his opinion must be regarded as weighty. The scribal hand bears a strong general resemblance to that of Fergusson, but it seems to differ in some particulars.

him, Fergusson's employment has been considered the direst sort of burden, but the fact that a man is a poet should not exempt him from hard work. David Herd, his close friend, endured the same situation all his life, and yet found relief in his dedicated pursuit of Scots songs. At the same time, it can be easily understood that copying may have been abhorrent to Fergusson. What did the future hold for him in that occupation? He could have sought a career in the law, and some of his biographers were of the opinion that he actually had undertaken that study.³ It is not improbable, for a copyist's work often was a preparation for the law, and some knowledge of it was requisite to an extraction clerk's daily labors. Could a lively mind such as Fergusson's have drudged on without finding the slightest interest in what he was doing? I think not. And yet it must be admitted that, despite good wages and a possible future profession, the hours of copying pressed down on poor Fergusson.

Peterkin illustrates his boredom:

...in the course of one forenoon, he blundered the same extract two different times. When he returned to the office in the evening, he found that the paper had been much wanted; and after venting a coarse expression against the person who molested

3. Ruddiman (Dickens), p. viii; Peterkin, pp. 33, 34.

him, he sat down a third time to the business. He had not, however, got his copy half finished, when he cried out to his office companion, that a thought had just struck him, which he would instantly put into verse, and carry to Ruddiman's Magazine (on the eve of publication), but that he would instantly return and complete the extract. He immediately scrawled out "Verses on Mr Thomas Lancashire," and ran with them to the press. On his return towards the office, he called at the shop of Mr Sommers, Print-seller and Glazier, below the Commissary office, Parliament Square, where he found the shop-boy reading a poem on Creation. This circumstance furnished him with another topic for versifying, and he wrote a coarse epigram on his friend Sommers.⁴ These proceedings occupied him about twenty minutes; and having thus given vent to the effervescence of his fancy, he returned quietly to his drudgery.⁵

That incident occurred in April 1772.

4. Sommers (pp. 26, 27) writes: "...I happened to be absent; he found, however, my shop-boy Robert Aikman (a great favourite of Fergusson's), then engaged in copying from a collection of manuscript hymns, one on the Creation, given to him by a friend of the author, in order to improve his hand in writing. Fergusson looked at the hymn, and supposing that I had given it to the boy, not merely to transcribe, but to learn its serious contents, took the pen out of his hand, and upon a small slip of paper, wrote the following lines:

"Tom Sommers is a gloomy man,
 "His mind is dark with sin,
 "O holy Jesus, glaze his soul,
 "That light may enter in!"

He then desired the boy to give his compliments to me, delivered to him the slip of paper, and retired."

5. Peterkin, pp. 30, 31.

One of the aspects of the Commissary Office that would have been oppressive was the personality of Fergusson's superior. Abercromby showed him favor, but he was not a man in good health and he was often testy and hard on those who worked for him, though he no doubt was liked by them. Eventually he journeyed to Bath for his health, where he died on 21 December 1772.⁶ (He was succeeded several months later by Alexander Duncan.⁷) Irving claims that Fergusson's leaving the Commissary Office for a time was the result of Abercromby's temper; but that is unlikely.

It is more likely that Fergusson changed places only because of a lull in the affairs of the Commissary Office. Just when he did work in the Sheriff-Depute's Office is difficult to say, for none of the registers contains evidence.⁸ He left there, it has been said, because he found it distasteful to write out the instruments of execution for the sale of property: romantic nonsense. He would have

6. Advertiser, 29 December 1772-1 January 1773. In the Courant, 29 June 1772, a gentleman, "lately in bad health," advertises for a companion to accompany him to London and to Bath. This may well have been Abercromby.
7. Courant, 27 March 1773.
8. Again McDiarmid (p. 44) identifies a hand as Fergusson's: in the Sheriff Court Register of Deeds "between August 1772... and the beginning of 1773." The script is not his; the Deeds end with August 1772 and are missing throughout 1773.
9. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 82. Peterkin (p. 28) states that Fergusson found various functions distasteful, but does not specify executions of sale.

had much the same unpleasant thing to do at the Commissary Office. After a short stay of only several months with the Sheriff-Depute,¹ Archibald Cockburn,² he returned to his old job, where he remained until near the end of 1773.

"We have been favoured with three Pastorals, under the titles of Morning, Noon, and Night, written by a young Gentleman of this place, the stile of which appears as natural and picturesque as that of any of the modern ones hitherto published." This issue contained Morning and the two successive issues, of 14 and 21 February, presented the companion pieces, Noon and Night. They were written by Robert Fergusson and they were unsigned. He was waiting to gauge their reception before he revealed that he was the talented young man who had out-Shenstone Shenstone. He had at least approached that, but it does not represent a great accomplishment, for Shenstone's rhymes and pictures of love-sick shepherds are to us only shiny, unassailed miniatures of a poetically complacent age. To Fergusson, however, they were a refined expression which he had to rival if he were to attain literary immortality.

For the ripple of local fame which followed as a feeble

1. Peterkin, p. 28.

2. Courant, 9 October 1773.

Walter Riddiman, the proprietor of the periodical in which his poems appeared. It was probably just before this time that the poetry section of The Weekly Magazine, or The Edinburgh Amusement of 7 February 1771 prefaced a pastoral poem: "We have been favoured with three Pastorals, under the titles of Morning, Noon, and Night, written by a young Gentleman of this place, the stile of which appears as natural and picturesque as that of any of the modern ones hitherto published." This issue contained Morning and the two successive issues, of 14 and 21 February, presented the companion pieces, Noon and Night. They were written by Robert Fergusson and they were unsigned. He was waiting to gauge their reception before he revealed that he was the talented young man who had out-Shenstoned Shenstone. He had at least approached that, but it does not represent a great accomplishment, for Shenstone's rhymes and pictures of love-sick shepherds are to us only shiny, enameled miniatures of a poetically complacent age. To Fergusson, however, they were a refined expression which he had to rival if he were to attain literary immortality.

For the ripple of local fame which followed as a feeble substitute for immortality, Fergusson owed his gratitude to

1. Johnson, George Harvey, Notes on the Riddiman (Edinburgh 1887), v. IX.
2. Ibid.
3. Annot, p. 451.

Walter Ruddiman, the proprietor of the periodical in which his poems appeared. It was probably just before this time that he had become acquainted with Ruddiman, perhaps through the offices of David Herd or George Paton. The meeting was the most opportune that could have been, because The Weekly Magazine was the best possible vehicle in Scotland for public presentation of his poetry.

Walter Ruddiman, the nephew of the Latin grammarian Thomas Ruddiman, had commenced his Weekly Magazine in 1769 after a similar, but unsuccessful, earlier venture.¹ Actually a half-newspaper, it constituted such a serious threat to the existing bi- and tri-weekly journals that legal petitions from his rivals eventually compelled Ruddiman to alter its basic character.² Consisting of original articles on agriculture, trade, politics, and literature, along with extracts from other sources, "the publication was very successful. Indeed, it became so, in a degree unprecedented in Scotland; for, in winter 1776, the number of copies sold amounted to three thousand weekly."³ Fergusson could hardly have expected a wider audience. His connection with the Magazine lasted until very near the end of his productive period.

1. Johnson, George Harvey, Notes on the Ruddimans ([Edinburgh] 1887), v. IX.

2. Ibid.

3. Arnot, p. 453.

The pages which Ruddiman dedicated to poetry usually were filled with work contributed by readers and with poems and fragments of poems taken from the publications of established poets. But Fergusson was taken on as a paid poet. Ruddiman "often entertained him at his table, besides communicating small pecuniary assistance,"⁴ and it is "confirmed by the Ruddiman MSS.," claims Grosart, that Fergusson received "regular payments for his poems as they appeared from week to week, and from 1771-2 the Poet had a gift of two suits of clothes--one for week-days and one for Sundays."⁵ These payments are a good measuring stick of the contemporary esteem and approval of Fergusson's English poems.

A reading of Fergusson's first poems as they appeared in The Weekly Magazine is not very rewarding. That is not to say that they are without value, for they probably reflect more autobiographical interest than is generally suspected. If the wording, the ideas, and the conventions of the poems are not rich, the technical mastery of meter does warrant notice. They cannot be considered juvenile imitations, but rather the work of a skilled poet in accepted traditions.

4. Sommers, p. 15.

5. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 103. "Memoranda also go to prove that he received from time to time money and book-gifts from admirers." (p. 104). But where are the Ruddiman manuscripts?

Many a better established poet published worse stuff, duller and less interesting, which we still read today.

The Pastorals display some of his best technical qualities. The lines scan, and there is rarely an awkward placement of words, though nothing brilliant emerges. The three pieces were written after 1770. (Fergusson seems to have taken the names "Alexis" and "Amyntas," as well as certain lines, from Michael Bruce, whose works were published in 1770.⁶) Consisting of dialogues between three pairs of shepherds, the themes are love and philosophy and, for us, the last dialogue is especially interesting. Fergusson was undoubtedly a deist and accepted a good, regulating God of nature, rather than the stern eighteenth century Presbyterian creation. His lines show it:

That righteous Power, before whose heav'nly eye
The stars are nothing, and the planets die;
Whose breath divina supports our mortal frame,
Who form'd the lion wild, and lambkin tame.

...

At his command the bounteous spring returns;
Hot summer, raging o'er th' Atlantic, burns;
The yellow autumn crowns our sultry toil,
And winter's snows prepare the cumb'rous soil.

Night

6. MacLaine, Robert Fergusson: A Critical Study, p. 131. These names were commonly used, however, and perhaps Bruce, in turn, took "Alexis" from Pope's Pastorals.

Further, he expressed the Chain of Being, an idea which appears in Genesis, but which he probably took as it had passed through the pantheistic verse of Thomson:

For man, the object of his chiefest care,
Fowls he hath form'd to wing the ambient air,
For him the steer his lusty neck must bend;
Fishes for him their scaly fins extend.

Night

The love theme of the Pastorals may have a specific indication, but without obvious references, we can view it only as the stylized shepherd-moan of the times.

April 1771, as it was, not as it was wont to be, which appeared 16 May, is an occasional piece of little merit.

A Saturday's Expedition: in mock heroics (1 August) is fairly good blank verse narrative. John Philips' poems, which leave their mark on many of Fergusson's, influenced it, but it should be remarked that Philips and Fergusson shared the common influence of Virgil. Lines such as these:

And we with joy elate our march began
For Leith's fair port, where oft Edina's sons
The week conclude, and in carousal quaff
Port, punch, rum, brandy, and Geneva strong,
Liquors too nervous for our feeble purse.

can be traced unmistakably to Philips' Cyder. The Fergussonian humor of the later vernacular poems is discovered in a description of seasickness: in the eighteenth century, humor

was often linked with crudeness, and Fergusson achieves a risible effect by expressing it, as Fielding, in epic terms. While the style is sometimes prosaic ("Sweet navigable stream! where commerce reigns..."), it is a relief to escape the sheepfold for a while. Finally we are left with a moral, a recommendation of Saturday expeditions as a cure for gout. Of course, when we remember the words "in mock heroics," which appear in the title, we cannot be sure that his moral is not part and parcel of the whole humorously exaggerated tone of the piece.⁷ It has already been suggested that The Decay of Friendship (19 September) may have been written for John Forbes' malefit in 1768, though its theme ("When gold, man's sacred deity, did smile,/My friends were plenty, and my sorrows few...") hardly suggests the incident. And, at any rate, its indignation is not entirely convincing. On 10 October the verses, Written at the Hermitage of Braid, near Edinburgh, were a change to a would-be romantic treatment in sing-song meter, but the words were still the poetry-words of the century. The final publication of the year was A Burlesque Elegy on the Amputation of a Student's Hair, Antecedent to his Entering

7. Renwick, W. L., Review of Sydney Goodsir Smith's Robert Fergusson, The Scottish Historical Review, v. XXXIII, no. 115 (April 1954).

into Orders (21 November). The idea is from Ramsay (On the Most Honourable the Marquess of Bowmont's Cutting off his Hair), with a touch of The Rape of the Lock ("O sad catastrophe! O event dire!"). All of these poems were signed, and they no doubt scintillated on the often lustreless poetry pages of The Weekly Magazine of 1771.

The reader should be assured that I am not tracking down literary influences merely for the pleasure of the "bag." Rather, I want to emphasize what has been overlooked in Fergusson criticism: that he was a well-read, erudite man of considerable cultural width. He was not a boy wonder, as Chatterton, nor was he a member of the bumpkin school of poetry--those plumber poets, mason poets, and milkmaid poets who, let it be admitted, were certainly gifted--who flourished in his day. He sprang from an educated family; he had a full academic background; he was known in intellectual and artistic circles. His connections with music, drama, and literature indicate a social life at a high level, though certainly not at the snob level. Overtones and undertones of earlier English and Scottish poetry in his work prove his essentially artistic and intellectual approach to his own poetry.

As mottos to introduce various of his poems, he selected passages from Virgil, Horace, Shakespeare, Drummond of Hawthornden,

The Pastorals show, aside from other general influences, a specific relationship with Gray's English contemporaries: John Philips, Butler, Gay, Beaumont and Fletcher, and others. General English influences in his poetry include Spenser, Milton, Pope, Thomson, Gray, Shenstone, Gay, Philips, Collins, Michael Bruce, John Cunningham, Christopher Anstey (?). It should be noted that Fergusson was well acquainted with the English work that was being done in his own time, and that he would have had much opportunity to nourish his taste for contemporary English poets in the lively book world of Edinburgh. But more astounding is the knowledge he had of Scottish literature, for all of the texts of the makars were not readily available (except from the libraries of Paton and Herd). He knew the poetry of Blind Harry, Gavin Douglas, James I, Sir David Lindsay, Dunbar, Montgomery, Alexander Scott, the Sempills of Beltrees, Alexander Pennecuik the elder, and Allan Ramsay. His classical reading included Virgil and Horace (as well as the later Latin works of George Buchanan), and this background tempered much of his English, as well as his Scottish, poetry.

To make a full estimate of the depth of these influences would require a great deal of space, but a few examples will suffice to show how Fergusson caught up words and phrases from his catholic literary background. His first extant poem (?) is a translation from Horace, and his second is modeled on Sempill.

8. See the pastorals of Gray.

The Pastorals show, aside from other general influences, a specific relationship with Gray's Elegy:

Gray: "The lowing herd walks slowly o'er the lea."

Pastorals: "To lowing herds when raging Sirius burns."

Gray: "The ploughman homeward plods his weary way."

Pastorals: "The weary ploughman flees the waving fields."

And further parallels occur.⁸ Gray reappears in An Expedition to Fife:

Gray: "...and drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds."

Expedition: "And solemn sounding whisp'ings lull the spray."

Milton, too, has his share in the Expedition:

Milton (L'Allegro): "In Heaven yclep'd Euphrosyne..."

Expedition: "In heaven yclepit Pleasure..."

In A Saturday's Expedition, something more obscure appears:

Milton (Paradise Lost): "Now came still evening on and twilight gray had in her sober livery all things clad."

Saturday's Expedition: "Now still returning eve creep'd gradual on, and the bright sun, as weary of the sky, etc."

In Hamlet are the lines: "There is a willow grows aslant a brook, That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream."

Fergusson used the expression "glassy stream" in Good Eating, Pastorals in particular. They may also appear elsewhere as well as elsewhere.

8. See the pastoral Night for a longer paraphrase of the Elegy.

The few foregoing examples could be multiplied, but the implication is already clear: Fergusson covered the poetic past with concentration and diligence. Consciously or unconsciously, he composed lines similar to those of Gray, Milton and others, and it is probable that he did so consciously, for he knew exactly what he was doing. He was no scribbler and he was not divinely inspired; he was a genuine man of letters. His folk-like Scots poems tend at first to lead us to a hasty judgment of his native genius, but when we realize that even in the dialect poems he had his classical Scots models and a truly learned philological appreciation of the Scots tongue, we must revise our opinions and regard his artistry with critical veneration.

It is unjust, however, to think that Fergusson merely imitated, for rarely is a poet able to step outside his age. Only once or twice in a century does an innovator appear. The Hermitage of Braid poem is perhaps an outstanding example of Fergusson's inability to divorce himself from his times, even when handling a Wordsworthian subject.

The poems of 1771 were of an ambitious nature, the Pastorals in particular. They were not written out in a few odd evenings and, just as they embody years of careful

reading, they also are based on a sound critical sense. It is important to notice that Fergusson might well have stumbled down the soggy paths of sentimentalism, but that he kept to the hard pavements of classicism. In 1771 Henry MacKenzie's tear-soaked pages of The Man of Feeling enveloped all of Great Britain in a purgative state of depression, and a little earlier James MacPherson's Ossianic poems, whether authentically from the Gaelic or not, caused not a little impassioned wailing in all corners of Scotland. It is to Fergusson's credit that his vision was clear: his answer to all of this, The Sow of Feeling (Weekly Magazine, 8 April 1773), was probably offensive not only to MacKenzie but to many a weeping maiden. At his worst, the poet remained Theocritan. Of Fergusson's critical talents, Miss Ruddiman recalled an instance:

Miss Ruddiman informed me that Mr. Arthur Mason, editor of the well-known School-Collection, was one [of] the favourite guests at her brother's literary parties. If previous to such occasions he met with any classical difficulty, he was accustomed to consult Fergusson, especially if the Rev. Mr. Greenlaw was expected to be present. With this facetious scholar Mr. Mason, on the strength of very recently acquired enlightenment on particular quaestiones vexatae duly introduced, had frequent encounters: nor did Fergusson fail to assist the weaker vessel. He usually carried about with him a pocket edition of Homer and the Aeneid of Virgil: and when, as was frequently the case, Mr. Mason was being pushed to the wall by his wily antagonist, our poet would casually introduce another knot on which he foreknew Mr. Greenlaw entertained strong opinions, when the brunt of the word-battle was borne

by the youthful knight. Mr. Mason and Mr. Greenlaw greatly esteemed Fergusson. Miss Ruddiman vividly recalled a particular tea-party at which both were present, as well as the poet, Mr. Woods, Mr. Wilson, and others, when Fergusson and Mr. Greenlaw had a severe tussle. Mr. Greenlaw was obliged to yield the point (which Miss Ruddiman vainly endeavoured to recall), and in doing so said emphatically, "That young man is a burning, God grant that he may be a shining light. The more's the pity for us that no one takes him by the hand."⁹

The Weekly Magazine related another:

Mr Fergusson being one day in company with two of his friends, and the discourse turning on poetry, one of the gentlemen, who was a little self-conceited, observed, that he thought there was no difficulty in equalling, if not excelling Gray's Elegy in a Country Church-yard, or any of Shenstone's pastorals. Upon which Fergusson and the other agreed that he should, in the first place, attempt the pastoral stile; in which, if he succeeded, he should then be allowed to proceed to the elegiac; which the gentleman accordingly undertook to perform. Some time after, having produced his performance to Fergusson, our Caledonian bard began to read it with great attention, till coming to a passage where the author supposed his mistress seated on an island in the middle of a river, and imagined himself to be writing love sonnets, and throwing them into the stream, which, he said, would bear them to his Dulcinea, "By Jove," exclaimed Fergusson, "You are mistaken, for a river always throws its filth to the banks."¹

Despite learned care and confident faith, in 1771

Fergusson's fame was hollow. Not until after The Daft Days of the following year did he acquire a sound literary status.

9. Grosart, Works, pp. lxi, lxii. Janet Ruddiman was only a child at the time she knew Fergusson.
1. Weekly Magazine, 22 February 1776.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Edinburgh club life afforded Robert Fergusson a spiritual expansion and offered him an association with men who were interested in his artistic creativity. We know that he was a member of at least two clubs in the town and that he was much sought after for his talents at conversation, mimicry, song, poetry.

It was hard to escape being a club member, so numerous were organizations of all sorts and of all intents. There was a Soaping Club, a Sweating Club, a Gormandizing Club, a Pandemonium Club, and so on. Some professed idealistic purposes, some were soberly convivial, and others were drunken, obscene, and even murderous. Basically they were an escape from confined housing conditions and from an ecclesiastical straight-jacket which forbade other types of amusement. Except for a few tightly closed circles, most of them had one bright virtue: democracy. They cleaved away the social barriers between a philosopher and his shoemaker, and the resultant atmosphere in Edinburgh was that of a large, friendly village with human philosophers and literate shoemakers.

Fergusson was associated with a debating group, "a spouting club,"¹ known first as the Robinhood Society and later as the

1. Inverarity (Scots Magazine, November 1801) says, however, "he never spouted."

Pantheon. Its practice was to debate, at the Thistle Lodge and before the public, questions of political and literary interest. The proceeds of the admissions were earmarked for charity, but after expenses were paid, honorariums given to the debaters, and a raucous and expensive entertainment held for its ten members at Newhaven or elsewhere, the Society usually had difficulty in making ends meet.² Fergusson probably was a member from the Society's commencement in 1773, for in that year he celebrated it in two of his poems, Mutual Complaint of Plainstones and Causey (March) and Leith Races (July):

Siclike in Robinhood debates,
Whan two chiels hae a pingle...

Pingles there were. After a few unfortunate uprisings on the part of the audience, two soldiers of the Town Guard regularly patrolled the meetings.³ Other members of the club were James Wilson ("Claudero"), a poet, and Thomas Sommers, who was treasurer from 1881 to 1788, but who probably was not a member in Fergusson's time. In April 1791 the subject of a Pantheon debate was: "Whether have the exertions of Allan Ramsay or

2. MS. 186, National Library of Scotland. John A. Fairley printed this in The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club, v. I (Edinburgh 1908).

3. MS. 578, no. 151, National Library of Scotland. Perhaps for their own safety, ladies were not admitted to the debates. Courant, 27 August 1768: "A meeting of the MEMBERS OF the CAPE is appointed to be held at Mrs. Walker's in Leith, on Saturday, the 10th of September ensuing, at three o'clock afternoon. C. F. D."

Robert Fergusson done more honour to Scotch poetry?"⁴

Let us slide back in our chronology now to the end of the year 1772. By that time, Fergusson was no longer an obscure copyist. His vernacular poems were appearing in The Weekly Magazine and he could number many artists, poets, and musicians among his friends. Some of them were members of the Cape Club. No doubt his poetic ability, as well as his social gifts, brought him into the circle, for the club had its literary pretensions and its share of "scribbling members."⁵

This was neither the best nor the worst of Edinburgh clubs, but a comfortable in-between. It had had an informal genesis in the 1720's, although it was not formally instituted until September 1768,⁶ when its officers (a Sovereign, a

4. It was debated by seven members, two of whom chose poetry as a medium for their arguments: The Laurel Disputed; or, the Merits of Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson Contrasted; in two poetical Essays, Delivered in the Pantheon at Edinburgh, on Thursday April 14th 1791... by E. Picken, and A. Wilson (Edinburgh 1791). Alexander Wilson was the only member who defended Fergusson. A gentleman named Cumming, by means of bribery, managed to win the debate.
5. The Weekly Magazine of 14 December 1769 contains a parody on Hamlet's soliloquy entitled To the scribbling Members of C. F. D. (Concordia Fratrum Decus, the club's motto).
6. Its Sederunt Book (National Library MS. 2004), written out by David Herd, states that the club started in 1764 and that its officers were chosen in 1768. Courant, 27 August 1768: "A meeting of the KNIGHTS Of the CAPE is appointed to be held at Mrs. Walker's in Leith, on Saturday, the 10th of September ensuing, at three o'clock afternoon. C. F. D."

Secretary [treasurer], and a Recorder) and Council were chosen. Shortly afterwards, its laws were set down on vellum for all members to sign. The purpose of the club was avowedly convivial: on pseudonyms based, it is said,

...Beer or Porter were their Liquors from fourpence to sixpence each the extent of their usual expence conversation and a song their usual amusement, gaming generally prohibited and a freedom to each to come and depart at their pleasure was always considered as essential to the Constitution of the Society.⁷

personalities, such as Sir Nun and Abbeas for James Ounmyng, Neither was "smoaking tobacco"--not a gentleman's vice in the heraldic painter, and Sir Beersteak for Cornforth those days--"allowed in the Cape."⁸ Various attempts at Gibson. Others were Sir Bayliff, Sir Beersteak, Sir Tee, maintaining a decorous and sober conviviality must have been and so on. To become a member, one entered a formal petition flouted often enough, however, since Cape Hall, the place of which was considered and subsequently voted upon. In due meeting, was always a room in a tavern. (During Fergusson's course, the successful aspirant was dubbed and the club artist, membership, it was at Walter Scott's in Geddes Close.⁹) Aside or artists, would sketch some symbolic depiction of the new from its social purpose, the Cape undertook to hold two regular Knight's title (a beersteak, a tee, or the like) on the reverse celebrations, one being in honor of Shakespeare and the other side of the membership petition. Alexander Runciman (Sir in honor of James Thomson. The latter occurred every ten years Brimstone) usually carried out this function, though it was on the date of Thomson's birth, having originated from a probably James Ounmyng who drew Sir President, seated and proposal in 1770 for a city-wide festival.¹ Fergusson was not holding a book, on the back of Fergusson's petition. It is

7. Sederunt Book.

8. Ibid.

9. Analysis of the Cape Sederunt Book, MS. 2000, National Library. It was at Walter Scott's from April 1771 to March 1774 and then at James Mann's Isle of Man Arms.

1. Courant, 25 August 1770.

a member when the Thomson festivals took place, though he may have written songs for the first of them.²

Members were designated "Knights Companions of the Cape," and they were given pseudonyms based, it is said, upon an amusing personal experience which they were required to recount upon entrance into the fraternity. Some of them, however, must have been accorded titles which suited their personalities, such as Sir Nun and Abbess for James Cummyng, the heraldic painter, and Sir Sobersides for Cornforth Gilson. Others were Sir Hayloft, Sir Beefsteaks, Sir Toe, and so on. To become a member, one entered a formal petition which was considered and subsequently voted upon. In due course, the successful aspirant was dubbed and the club artist, or artists, would sketch some symbolic depiction of the new Knight's title (a beefsteak, a toe, or the like) on the reverse side of the membership petition. Alexander Runciman (Sir Brimstone) usually carried out this function, though it was probably James Cummyng who drew Sir Precentor, seated and holding a book, on the back of Fergusson's petition. It is a delineation of a thin, sensitive-looking person, too vague to impart much to us.

3. Cape Club Petitions, MS. 2041, National Library.

2. Weekly Magazine, 11 October 1770.

5. Scottish Book.

Fergusson's petition was written by David Herd (Sir Scrape), who obviously proposed his membership:

To the Sovereign & Knights Companions
of the Cape
The Petition of Robt. Ferguson Writer in Edinbr.
Humbly Prays:
That he may have the Honour of being Admitted
a Member of their Society.

R Fergusson

Recommended by.

Mr Gilson; who likewise prays
David Herd Do--
James Cummyng--Ditto

Presented on Saturday the 3d. of October)
Night of Ballotting Saturday the 10th. Inst) 1772.

Speak Secry³

The new member was "admitted by 13 against 2 Balls by the Title of Sir Precenter."⁴ He probably had appeared at the time he had petitioned and related the story of his precentor escapade at St. Andrews. He was member number 157.

His formal installation took place on 30 January 1773 at the "Fifteenth Grand Cape held in John Woods Herriot's Gardens."⁵ This elaborate biennial affair was dedicated to the entrance of new Knights and to the election of officers. The Sovereign, Andrew Plummer (Sir Care), wearing the velvet

3. Cape Club Petitions, MS. 2041, National Library.

4. Ibid.

5. Sederunt Book.

cape, or crown (for which the club was named⁶), sat upon his throne. Eight Knights-to-be approached him singly; each one was

led up to the Sovereign by two knightly sponsors, and having made his obeisance, was required to grasp the large poker [which the Sovereign held in lieu of a mace] with his left hand, and laying his right hand on his breast, the oath de fideli, was administered to him by the Sovereign,--the knights present all standing uncovered,--in the following words:--

I swear devoutly by this light,
To be a true and faithful Knight,
With all my might,
Both day and night.
So help me Poker!

Having then reverentially kissed the larger poker, and continuing to grasp it, the Sovereign raised the smaller poker with both his royal fists, and aiming three successive blows at the novice's head, he pronounced, with each, one of the initial letters of the motto of the Club, C. F. D., explaining their import to be Concordia Fratrum Decus. The knight elect was then called upon to recount some adventure or scrape which had befallen him, from some leading incident in which the Sovereign selected the title conferred on him, and which he ever after bore in Cape Hall.⁷

As we have seen, however, Fergusson had gained his title several months before. For the privilege of entering, the poet paid a half crown and gave sixpence to the waiter. The

6. Some confusion has existed as to the origin of the name. It is said to have been derived from Tom Lancashire's (Sir Cape) nightly tour of "rounding the cape," i.e., passing around Calton Hill, to get home after meetings. In his letters, however, George Paton refers to the club as the "Cap," so that one suspects the Sovereign's cap or cape gave the group its name.

7. Wilson, Daniel, Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time (Edinburgh 1848), v. II, p. 17.

burlesque installation was an apparent parody on the ceremonials of Freemasonry.

Sir Precentor's Cape history can be traced quite satisfactorily in the minutes and other papers of the Club. In 1773 he signed the petitions of John Hepburn, a student of divinity (20 January); William Murray, "Writer" (8 July); William Logan (7 September); George Cameron, "engr[aver]" (14 September); Peter Christy (18 September); and Dugald Campbell, "Writer" (12 October, rejected 19 October). Fergusson's signature on these petitions, as elsewhere, seems very much overdone and reminds one of John Hancock's favor to his myopic monarch. In the same year, Fergusson was acting secretary on these dates: 20 January (before his formal installation); 17 and 21 April; 6 May; 8 July; 7, 14, 18, and 29[?] September; 19 October. Most of the attendance sheets are lost, but the roll records him as being present also on 30 January and 17 June. On the latter date was performed a "solemn Dirge," written by Fergusson and set to music by Gilson, to the memory of the Secretary, James Cockburn (Sir Speak), who had recently died. He was present at the Grand Cape of 24 July, but absent from that of 18 December. At the 18th Grand

was Fergusson
He had signed
to do so.
Hollan, the
Arthur's
Masonry
February

Cape, 2 July 1774,

It was agreed unanimously by the Grand Cape that the remainder of the Fines of the Absentees from this meeting after paying what Extraordinary Charges may attend the same shall be applied for the benefit and Assistance of a Young Gentleman a member of the Cape who has been a considerable time past in distress. And the Gentlemen present in the Grand Cape made a Contribution themselves for the same purpose.⁸

For "a considerable time past," then, the poet had been suffering mental disorder--from some time before December 1773. The connection with the Cape lasted about a year, and it is readily seen that Fergusson was active in its affairs and faithful in his attendance.

One phase of his activity was as a club poet, though there were other poets also among the Knights, such as Thomas Mercer (Sir Forgetful),⁹ and many poetasters:

8. Sederunt Book.

9. Campbell, p. 287: "In 1772, 'the Sentimental Sailor, or St Preux to Eloisa, an elegy, in two parts, with notes, dedicated to John James Rousseau,' was printed (anonymous) at Edinburgh. The author, I am informed, of this truly [sic] classical [!] poem, was _____ Mercer, a writer in Edinburgh, who, for some illegal malversation in his dealings, was obliged to leave his country. He has written and printed several other pieces of poetry, of considerable merit, a volume of which appeared in 1774.*
* "Poems, by the author of the Sentimental Sailor; containing Arthur's Seat, Elysium, a dream; of poetry, an epistolary essay,' 4to."

Mercer had attended Edinburgh University. His "malversation" was forgery (McDiarmid, p. 54) committed on behalf of a friend. He had hoped to repay the money he had embezzled, but was unable to do so. Fleeing first to London, perhaps he went later to Holland, his native country [?]. His only meritorious work is Arthur's Seat, which is a Scottish Cooper's Hill. The Caledonian Mercury advertises his Sentimental Sailor as published in February 1774.

the actor, William Woods, Cummyng, Runciman, etc. The Laing Manuscripts (II 334) preserve The Cape Song, which Grosart would not print, A Mournful Ditty (a parody of The Broom of Cowdenknowes), and the Summons, all in Fergusson's own handwriting, as well as David Herd's transcription of The Antiquary, a poem on James Cummyng written in 1773.¹ There is also The Capeiad in Three Canto's. together with the Songs of Cape. Being a Complete History in Verse of the Knights Companions of that Illustrious Order C. F. D.;² one part of this, The Progress of Knighthood, which is a parody of a song from Artaxerxes, was written by "The Knight of Precentor." Finally, on the back of the petition of James Clephan (later a Canongate Church manager who gave Burns permission to erect a stone on Fergusson's grave), the poet wrote a hasty song to celebrate the painters of the Cape.

This last was written in September or October 1773. Most of these poems are spritely compositions, and The Cape Song

1. See Appendix I for poems concerned with the Cape Club.
2. La. III 464, Edinburgh University. This book lacks some leaves: one of the missing leaves contained a song by Fergusson entitled, Come all ye wild young Knights.

Because I lovd the Warrest dram
That Fox in Mouth did burn

and under the mercury treatment, let us say, he was compelled

to follow a temperate existence. The Summons is a set of
in particular throws light on the club's nocturnal business:

In freedoms gay frolick, we shorten the night
With humorous pitching & Songs of Delight,
Then Who would not rather in Capehall get drunk
Summons: For Sixpence, than give half a Crown to a Punk

To that poem Fergusson added a note when he sent it along to

Herd: "Dont shew this to the Knights as I would wish to

surprise them with it--Yours &[c] R Fergusson." A Mournful

Ditty is a puzzling piece of work which seems to have an obscene

signification. It purports to have been written by "the Knight

of Complaints," Alexander Clapperton, but actually it is the

work of Fergusson. Making references to "the Shades" and a

forced abstinence from liquor, stanza IV gives a hint as to

the cause of the abstinence:

She brought a Gill sae Strong and Sweet
The Knights stood drouthy by
Even Pitcher Hume in dumbness gazd
He was so very dry.

In my opinion, the cryptic meaning is this: "She" is the

proprietriss of an establishment of ill repute; "gill" must

be a pun to indicate a girl (for "gillet"). In consequence

of an encounter, the Knight of Complaints contracted venereal

disease: and, 4 April 1774. Clarke lived in Bain's land,

Blackfriars Wynd. About 1780 he published Two Sonnets for
the Piano. Because I lovd the Warmest dram
Scotts Musical That Eer in Mouth did burn (Stenhouse,

William, ed., The Scots Musical Museum, Edinburgh 1841,
and under the mercury treatment, let us say, he was compelled

Fergusson's friends, was minister at St. Andrew's Chapel
(McDiarmid, p. 25).

to follow a temperate existence. The Summons is a set of doggerel verses which call Fergusson to account for having written the Ditty (though, of course, he also wrote the Summons):

Therefore I charge you that ye Summon
Precentor base born son of woman
 To answer in the hour of cause
 For open insult to our Laws
 Likeas ordain him to depone
 If he has Lybells [?] any one
 Containing Treasonable Rhymes
 Or other Treasonable Crimes
 Which he has Issued gainst the Shades
 And all our Bumper drinking blades...

But, in the end, the mystery of "the Shades" is insoluble, since identification of all the allusions is impossible.

The Progress of Knighthood makes reference to the Cape's

"Vocal Knights":

No pitching then or song was heard
 Brisk Laughter to afford
 But now some score of Vocal Knights
 With Music hail the Board

The musical members would include Gilson, Ferdinand Arrigoni (Sir Claret), John Smeiton, and Stephen Clarke, the last a music teacher and organist at St. Andrew's Chapel³ and a collaborator

3. Courant, 4 April 1774. Clarke lived in Bain's land, Blackfriars Wynd. About 1790 he published Two Sonatas for the Piano-Forte or Harpsichord. Thamusical editor of The Scots Musical Museum, he died 6 August 1797 (Stenhouse, William, ed., The Scots Musical Museum, Edinburgh 1853, v. I, pp. xviii and lxxiii). Dr. Charles Webster, another of Fergusson's friends, was minister at St. Andrew's Chapel (McDiarmid, p. 25).

with Burns and Johnson on The Scots Musical Museum. And of the artists: more of that, but we can recover only a few definite facts. St. Luke shall Every honour Claim
The Muses brightest only theme⁴
since the poet took the trouble to write an elaborate stanza about him: They were Runciman, Cummyng, Dugald McLaurin, John Brown (a poet as well), Jacob Moir, David Scott, and John Bonnar. Throughout the history of the club, names outstanding as these appear. James Sibbald, the collector of old Scots poems, Raeburn and Nasmyth, the artists, Gilbert Martin and John Wotherspoon, Herd's publishers, were all Cape members. Less well-known are Andrew Plummer, an antiquarian, later Sheriff-Depute of Selkirkshire, and Sovereign (1771-73) in Fergusson's time, and Tom Lancashire, an actor, publican, and possibly the Cape's first Sovereign, on whose death Fergusson wrote:

the Cannon Alas, poor Thom! how oft, with merry heart,
Have we beheld thee play the sexton's part,
Dallas, & Each comic heart must now be grieved to see
The sexton's dreary part perform'd on thee.⁵

in 1770, Cummyng was appointed deacon of the Cape Church. Not the least of the Knights was Deacon William Brodie who, the Registrar. He carried out most of the work of the club, given to burglarizing homes at night, was finally hanged; in his own careless fashion—after the death of the club, after his name on the list of members, he is depicted as swinging on a gallows.

7. Courant, 7 November 1772. See also Courant, 15 April 1772.
4. See Appendix I.
5. Lancashire died 12 April 1772 (Courant, 15 April 1772). Thus Fergusson knew him before he entered the Cape Club.

Which of the Knights was closest to Fergusson? We should like to know more of that, but we can uncover only a few definite friends. James Cummyng must have been one of them, since the poet took the trouble to write an eleven stanza poem about him:

A Druid's Sacred form he bears
With Saucer Eyes of Fire
An Antique Hat on's head he wears
Like Ramsay the Town Cryer.

While Cummyng's chief distinction was his antiquarianism--he was a leading member in the Society of Antiquaries, as well as of the Commercial Society, Freemasons, Gormandizing Club, Painters (St. Luke) Society, Pandemonium Society, the Society of Teachers, and others--by profession he was a painter. He had studied under George Norie and "used to carry on Work in the Cannongate [sic]." ⁶ In 1761 he was married to Marion Dallas, a widow. When Robert Boswell was made Lyon-Depute in 1770, Cummyng was appointed Herald Painter and Keeper of the Register. ⁷ He carried out most of the work in the Office--in his own careless fashion--under the sharp eyes of a rather

6. Cumming MSS., La. II 82, Edinburgh University.
7. Courant, 7 November 1770. See also Grant, Francis J., ed., Court of the Lord Lyon List of His Majesty's Officers of Arms and other Officials with genealogical notes 1318-1945 (Edinburgh 1946).
8. Minutes of the Musical Society (Musical Society Sedentary Book). Introduced by James Norie, this became a major occupation for Edinburgh painters.
9. Courant, 9 December 1772.

unpleasant taskmaster, holding the position for three years. Just what sort of connection he had with Fergusson cannot be known, but later on I am going to assume one of an important nature.⁸

Another artist friend was Alexander Runciman. One of the key artists of Scotland in that he was an influence on Raeburn, Runciman had very early gained local renown for his decoration of the Ossian Hall in the home of Sir James Clerk of Penicuik.⁹ Shakily financed by Sir James, in February 1767 he journeyed with his brother John to Italy for further study.¹ Returning to Edinburgh at the end of 1771, he won his livelihood by selling pictures which he had collected on the Continent² and by accepting commissions for decorative painting.³ A year following, he was appointed the director of the Drawing School.⁴ One of the works for which he was best known was

8. For further information on Cummyng, see Archaeologia Scotica (Edinburgh MDCCCXC), v. V, pp. 8, 9. There is a portrait of Cummyng in this volume.
9. Fergusson visited this Hall and wrote verses about it. The paintings were destroyed by fire in 1899, but a description of them was contemporarily published by Walter Ross, a Cape member (McDiarmid, p. 57).
1. Courant, 9 February 1767. John, who was the better artist of the two, died there c. 1768. Little of his work is extant, but the etching of the Netherbow Port, to which Alexander affixed his own name, is an example.
2. Advertiser, 17-21 July 1772.
3. This he did for the Musical Society (Musical Society Sederunt Book). Introduced by James Norie, this became a major occupation for Edinburgh painters.
4. Courant, 9 December 1772.

the painting of the altar piece in the English Chapel (now St. Patrick's Catholic Church) which was completed in 1774.⁵

There the Prodigal Son is depicted; and it is possible that

Fergusson was the model for it.

...That artist was...painting in his own house in the Pleasance, a picture on a half length cloth, of the Prodigal Son, in which his fancy and pencil had introduced every necessary object and circumstance suggested by the sacred passage. At his own desire, I called to see it;--I was much pleased with the composition,--colouring, and admirable effect of the piece, at least what was done of it; but expressed my surprise, at observing a large space in the centre, exhibiting nothing but chalk outlines of a human figure. He informed me that he had reserved that space for the Prodigal, but could not find a young man whose personal form, and expressive features, were such as he could approve of, and commit to the canvas. Robert Fergusson's face and figure, instantly occurred to me: Not from an idea, that Fergusson's real character was that of the Prodigal; by no means; but, on account of his sprightly humour, personal appearance, and striking features. I asked Mr. Runciman, if he knew the Poet?--He answered in the negative, but that he had often read and admired his Poems. That evening at five, I appointed to meet with him and the Poet, in a tavern, Parliament close;--we did so; and I introduced him. The painter was much pleased, both with his figure and conversation. I intimated to Fergusson the nature of the business on which we met;--he agreed to sit next forenoon--I accompanied him for that purpose, and in a few days, the picture strikingly exhibited the Bard in the character of a prodigal, sitting on a grassy bank, surrounded by swine, some of which were sleeping, and others feeding; his right leg over his left knee; eyes uplifted, hands clasped, tattered clothes, and with expressive countenance bemoaning his forlorn, and miserable situation! This picture when finished, reflected high honour on the painter, being much admired. It was sent to the Royal Exhibition in London, where it was also highly esteemed, and there purchased by a

5. Scots Magazine, October 1774.

gentleman of taste and fortune at a considerable price. I have often expressed a wish to see a print from it, but never had that pleasure; as it exhibited a portrait of my favourite Bard, which for likeness, colouring, and expression, might have done honour to the taste, and pencil of a Sir Joshua Reynolds.⁶

The meeting of Fergusson with Runciman took place in mid-1772.

Sommers errs a little in this account, for the painting which was sent to the Royal Exhibition was not the one he describes: it is catalogued as "Luke xv, 20-21" and therefore must have been a painting of the Prodigal's Return.⁷ There are two extant copies of the Return, one in the possession of the Honorable Steven Runciman (from which the portrait in Gray's edition of the poems was taken) and the other in an altarpiece in St. Patrick's Church in Edinburgh. Though these pictures differ considerably, the figure of the Prodigal is the same in both, and therefore we can assume that Runciman used the same model for the whole Prodigal series he is said to have painted. It should be remembered, however, that the artist indulges in a freedom of conception and the Prodigal would not have to resemble Fergusson: Sommers was recalling the painting twenty-nine years after the poet's death. Runciman is remembered in Fergusson's poem, On Seeing a Collection of Pictures Painted by Mr. Runciman.

Aside from the other poets of the Club and the actor, William Woods, two men who must have meant much to Fergusson

6. Sommers, pp. 23-26.

7. Graves, Algernon, The Royal Academy of Arts, A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their Work from its foundation in 1769 to 1904 (London 1906).

were David Herd and George Paton.⁸ These two were the soul of many collections of Scots ballads which appeared in the late eighteenth century. David Herd is the better known of the two men. Like Fergusson, he was a copyist, employed most of his life by David Russell, an accountant. A sagacious and meticulous literary advisor to Walter Scott, the publisher Constable, and many others, Herd was interested in Scottish literature at a time when it was hardly fashionable. He never sought to be known, however, and he published his editions of songs anonymously (see Bibliography). If Herd was shy and retiring, George Paton was more so. Although he may have been the more gifted of the two, his lack of aggression leaves him only with the reputation of having corresponded voluminously with the great antiquarian editors of his day. He was born 23 June 1721⁹ in Edinburgh and seems to have been educated at the Perth Grammar School. Eventually he joined an expiring

8. Paton, however, was not an active member in Fergusson's time. He abandoned his participation in 1771. Kay, in his Portraits, tells us that Paton, Herd, and Fergusson were in the habit of gathering at Johnnie Dowie's Tavern for social and literary pastimes.

9. Previous writers have been in error concerning the date of his birth. The above date is substantiated by the records of baptism at the Register House, Edinburgh. For this and the following information, I am indebted to Mr. Ronald P. Doig of St. Andrews, who has made a study of Paton.

bookselling business, which had been inherited by his father with a legacy of debt.¹ When the shop finally did expire, Paton secured a Custom House clerkship, but he was left with a magnificent collection of books which became a common library for the antiquarians and literary men (who often eked out their own libraries with unreturned books). Despite Richard Gough's importuning Lord Buchan on his behalf, Paton was almost forgotten in his clerkship.² His interest in literature was purely that of an antiquarian, as was Herd's. But both men were unashamed Scotsmen, proud in a dull and reticent way of their cultural background: Scots speakers, Scots antiquarians, and Scots literateurs. That was enough to give them an affinity with a poet who, whether he wrote in English or in Scots, was himself unashamedly a Scot. One of the best evidences of the real affinity the poet had for these men is the extent to which he was acquainted with the makars: Douglas, Dunbar, Montgomery, and others. Without the libraries of Herd and Paton, he could hardly have laid his hands on the works of his predecessors. These men also

1. No record of the "cautionary obligation" referred to by Constable and repeated in DNB has been found, but many documents concerning the Patons' debts have been discovered among the records at the Register House.
2. Hecht, Hans, ed., Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts (Edinburgh 1904), pp. 4, 5.

linked young Fergusson to a more immediate predecessor, for both of them had been on intimate terms with Allan Ramsay.³

It was on Paton's account that notice of the poem Auld Reikie was included in Gough's British Topography.⁴ And his correspondence discloses something of greater significance: Fergusson had commenced a translation of Virgil. In November 1772 Paton wrote to Bishop Percy:

Please receive inclosed the "Battle of Corrichie"⁵ and "Description of Halow Fair" by a Young Lad of 18 years, he intends to imitate Gaw. Douglass by translating the Eclogues & Georgics, and then publishing the Aeneid with it, but of this afterwards.⁶

Two years later, on 1 December 1774, in another letter to Percy, he wrote:

Several Weeks ago the promising Scots poetic Genius Ferguson was cut off by a Fever, so the expected Scheme of Virgil's Eclogues &c. to complete Gavin Douglas is at an End.⁷

3. Pinkerton MS. 1709, National Library: "The old man was long my [Paton's] intimate acquaintance." George Chalmers wrote to Paton, "I rejoice to hear that you know so much of [Ramsay's] last twenty years." (MS. 29.5.8, f. 119, National Library).
4. [Gough, Richard], British Topography or an Historical Account of what has been done for illustrating the Topographical Antiquities of Great Britain and Ireland (London MDCCLXXX). Paton sent Gough lists of books which Gough included in his work without so much as copyreading them. For the notice of Auld Reikie see v. II, p. 683.
5. Written by a Mr. Forbes, but it appeared anonymously in The Weekly Magazine.
6. Percy Papers MSS., bMS Eng 893, Folder 124, Harvard University.
7. MS. 32, 332, f. 87, British Museum.

And to Gough (on 17 July 1777) he stated that the project had actually been commenced:

...you may look for acceptance...[of] Rob. Ferguson's Scots Poems when finished that promising Genius was early cut off. he was to attempt Virgil's Eclogues & Georgics to compleat Gav. Douglas's Enead; but expired soon after exhibiting a few imitations of his work in M. S. which are perished now tho⁸ he died but two years since not much above 20 years or so. ~~he wrote that he had known the poet from his childhood.~~

By November 1772, and perhaps even before, Fergusson was taking a very serious view of his creative work in Scots. The poem Hallow-fair is certainly enough to convince us that he was linking himself to the chain of the makars. It is very interesting that Paton was one of the few--or was he the only one?--who recognized this during the poet's lifetime.

Other friends of Fergusson will be treated in the next chapter, but before going on, we should not forget Thomas Sommers. He was an art dealer and seller of artists' supplies, though he had been apprenticed to a glazier.⁹ His business must have been fairly flourishing, for he allegedly sold originals of masters¹ and undertook to publish historical

8. MS. 29. 5. 7, National Library. The "when finished" may refer to the 1779 Part II of the Poems. On 23 April 1779, he wrote to Gough that he was sending "the remainder of the pamphlet of Scots Poems &c..."

9. In Register of Marriages of the City of Edinburgh 1751-1800 he is described as a glazier and "deacon of the massons [sic]" (in 1770).

1. Courant, 22 January 1772.

etchings.² His chief claim to celebrity, however, commenced when "his Majesty's commission came down, appointing Deacon Thomas Sommers...to be his Majesty's glazier for Scotland."³ This was an unpaid sinecure. Actually it was not until 1793 that Sommers became a Knight Companion of the Cape, but he wrote that he had known the poet from his childhood. He was probably a casual acquaintance and would have seen Fergusson often as he went up to the Commissary Office, which was just above his shop, and Fergusson visited him there on occasion. Whatever reservations we may have about Sommers and his biography, we must show him gratitude for the preservation of some biographical material which would otherwise have been lost. We only wish that we could put a little more faith in the account he has written, for no other acquaintance of the poet, except Thomas Ruddiman, attempted the task of writing his life.

2. 6 July 1768.

3. 1 March 1777.

CHAPTER EIGHT

He could now rank among his friends, the first characters of his time, in the metropolis of Scotland. His heart was open and sincere; he was modest, but not reserved; good natured, but not to excess; full of vivacity, and vigour of intellect, and in short, he was the most joyous and covetable companion Sociality had to boast. Is it any wonder then, so rare, so precious a gem, whose lustre was so brilliant, should have been sought after, and prized according to its value?¹

Partially true. Henry MacKenzie, a "first character"--really the literary leader of the time--merely gave Fergusson an abrupt dismissal, implying his "propensity to coarse dissipation" and recalling him as "dissipated and drunken."² MacKenzie's memory and judgment did not always serve him well, whatever the truth of his abruptness may be. Obviously he was no friend of the poet.

There was something inoffensively snobbish about MacKenzie, and while he and several other mature and polished gentlemen were in charge, little room was left for a vernacular poet--unless, of course, his genius came quite directly from divine sources. It was in other circles that Fergusson had to find his place; he was more readily accepted by the bohemian

1. Campbell, p. 292.

2. MacKenzie, p. 150.

4. *Glasgow*, 1780.

5. *Advertiser*, 15-18 March 1780.

literati of the theatre, and it was in 1772 that the actor Frederick Guion honored him with his proper title:

Go on, Museiast of the Scotian plains,
Still charm "Auld Reikie's sons wi' canty strains;"
In troth they're sweet and pretty.
The lads and lasses all must sure agree,
And shew their solid judgment, naming thee
The Laureat of their City.

F. J. Guion.

Glasgow, Oct. 17. 1772.³

Ever since the performance of The Royal Shepherd in the Old Playhouse in the Canongate, Fergusson had been associating with people of the theatre. Guion was a member of Digges' company.

In 1765 David Ross, an eminent tragedian, provided the first regular management for the Edinburgh theatre in the Old Playhouse, a ramshackle building which had lost patronage as a result of its dilapidation,⁴ and the place where Allan Ramsay had operated his illegal theatre. Eventually Ross secured a patent for a new Theatre Royal in 1767 (it was a "rider" attached to the bill for the New Town's establishment), and the foundation stone was laid in the following March.⁵ After failing through two seasons, however, Ross had to relinquish his new theatre

3. Weekly Magazine, 22 October 1772. (See Appendix L.)

4. Courant, 7 January 1765.

5. Advertiser, 15-18 March 1768.

to Samuel Foote, who lasted only one full season. Finally it was West Digges who brought success to the theatre. Arriving in November 1771,⁶ he soon found it advisable to take a two-year, and then a seven-year, lease at the substantial figure of £500 a year.⁷ Between the Edinburgh seasons, he took his company off to Glasgow, where he also had leased the Theatre. Under Digges' management, there was great improvement in the Scottish theatre. Although Fergusson undoubtedly knew Digges, we have no direct knowledge of an acquaintance between them. We do know that he formed a notable friendship with one of the actors in Digges' company.

That actor was William Woods. He had come to Edinburgh in November 1771, a little after the start of the season of that year.⁸ In his first major role, as Glenalvon in Douglas,⁹ he was no striking success. It was not until 1774 that he was given important parts and therefore Fergusson never knew Woods

6. Courant, 6 November, 29 November 1771.

7. 27 March 1773.

8. 25 November 1771. He was delayed by bad weather and arrived too late to act in Macbeth, which was given in November.

9. Courant, 25 January 1772.

2. Chambers, p. 306.

3. At any rate, there was no such thing as a season ticket until the end of 1773 (Advertiser, 29 October-2 November 1773), though there were "subscriptions" and possibly a "free list."

as the eminent actor he eventually became.¹

It is said that,

Through the influence of Mr Woods, and in consideration, perhaps, of occasional poetical services, [Fergusson] enjoyed a free admission to the theatre, of which he took not infrequent advantage. To quote a memorandum which has been supplied to us on this subject--"He always sat in the central box, denominated the Shakespeare box; and his mode of expressing approbation in comic performances was very singular. Instead of clapping his hands, or using any exclamations, he used to show how much he was delighted by raising his right hand clenched above his head, and bringing it down emphatically on the front of the box, with a sweeping blow."²

It is very doubtful whether Woods had enough influence at that time to secure a steady free admission for anyone, but it is possible that others whom Fergusson knew could have managed it.³

Robert Anderson, who later edited The British Poets, was a friend who often accompanied Fergusson to the theatre. He had encountered the poet first in 1771 in Stuart's bookshop in Candlemaker Row and "frequently met him in private parties, in

however, had not the desired effect; and seems to have been

1. By the 1773-4 season, he began to act in major supporting roles, and before that he had undertaken leads, but only on his benefit nights--which he shared at first with others. Digges always took the leading parts himself. One of Woods' first important roles was in MacKenzie's Prince of Tunis in March 1773.
2. Chambers, p. 306.
3. At any rate, there was no such thing as a season ticket until the end of 1773 (Advertiser, 29 October-2 November 1773), though there were "subscriptions" and possibly a "free list."

the apartments of students, then at Edinburgh college."⁴

A certain feeling of triumph must have come to the poet on James Wilson's benefit night, 17 April 1773. Wilson had chosen to play Hoadley's The Suspicious Husband, and he was to speak "Between the Play and Farce, An Epilogue in the character of an Edinburgh Buck, (written by a Gentleman of this city,)..."⁵ On the night that Wilson spoke the Epilogue, its author sat in his box with little Janet Ruddiman on his knee. But when Wilson announced that Fergusson had written the piece, and when eyes turned and applause rose, "he hastily retired to the back."⁶ Two weeks later the Epilogue was printed in The Edinburgh Evening Courant.⁷

Houston Stewart Nicholson, poet, actor, and friend of Boswell, was so impressed with Fergusson's Epilogue that he wrote a letter to Garrick about it, suggesting that the London theatre might use poetry of such quality. "The recommendation, however, had not the desired effect; and seems to have been the only instance the poet experienced of patronage to place

4. Campbell, p. 298. ant of 13 February 1773, where his name is

5. Courant, 12 April 1773. Stewart.

6. Grosart, Works, p. lxxxviii. 11. McDiarmid (p. 80)

7. Courant, 3 May 1773. Carlos in The Town and Country

Contrasted, but it seems doubtful.

1. Fergusson, [John] Delaney, ed., The Journals of the Edinburgh Tour (Chapel Hill 1943). Under 22 May 1773 (p. 110): "...Leave Skateraw for Dunee along with Collector Lockhart, a lad of slender abilities and bashfully diffident to an extreme..."

him in a more independent and conspicuous situation."⁸

There were other friends, too, outside of the theatrical circle. We hear vaguely of "Collector Lorimer of Dunbar," Customs servant, with whom the poet used to ramble for several weeks each summer.⁹ Captain James Hay of Belton House remembered that Charles Lorimer sometimes visited North Belton and often brought his friend with him. Some of these visits were extended ones.

The biographical details are missing, unfortunately, for the warm-hearted and generous Lorimer. In The Edinburgh Almanac we find that Charles Lorimer was the Customs collector at Dunbar from about 1770 to 1814. Burns merely spoke of him as "a lad of slender abilities and bashfully diffident to an extreme."¹ But if a man can be judged by his willingness to

8. Sommers, p. 43. McDiarmid (p. 48) supplies a full note on Nicholson. He suggests that the similarity between Garrick's own epilogue and Fergusson's for the play The Suspicious Husband may have been the reason that Nicholson contacted the great actor. Nicholson probably knew the poet through Commissary office dealings, for a decret concerning him in the Consistorial Processes may have been written out in part by Fergusson. For notice of Nicholson's acting in Richard III, see the Courant of 13 February 1773, where his name is given as "Mr. Nicholson Stewart."

9. Grosart, Works, p. lxxxi, lxxxii. McDiarmid (p. 60) identifies Lorimer as Carlos in The Town and Country Contrasted, but it seems doubtful.

1. Fergusson, [John] DeLancey, ed., The Journal of the Border Tour (Chapel Hill 1943). Under 22 May 1778 (p. 118): "...Leave Skateraw for Dunse along with Collector Lorimer, a lad of slender abilities and bashfully diffident to an extreme..."

open his pocketbook for a friend, Lorimer deserves more than that. Burns must have questioned him about Fergusson just as he had questioned William Woods, Peter Stuart, and other old friends of his predecessor.

In a letter to Burns, Stuart wrote very strongly of the impression Fergusson had made upon him:

I cannot express my happiness sufficiently at the instance of your attachment to my late inestimable friend, Bob Fergusson, who was particularly intimate with myself and relations. [The "instance" refers to Burns' placing a stone on Fergusson's grave.] While I recollect with pleasure his extraordinary talents, and many amiable qualities, it affords me the greatest consolation, that I am honored with the correspondence of his successor in national simplicity and genius. That Mr. Burns has refined the art of poetry, must be readily admitted; but notwithstanding many favourable representations, I am yet to learn that he inherits his convivial powers.

There was such a richness of conversation, such a plenitude of fancy and attraction in him, that when I call the happy period of our intercourse to my memory, I feel myself in a state of delirium. I was then younger than him by eight or ten years, but his manner was so felicitous, that he enraptured every person around him, and infused into the hearts of the young and old, the spirit and animation which operated on his own mind.²

On 26 September 1773 there was a long jaunt to Dumfries to visit a fellow poet, Charles Salmon.

He was accompanied by a Lieutenant [James] Wilson of the navy; the son of a Mr. Wilson, well known at one time as a lecturer on elocution in Edinburgh, and the author of several occasional

2. Letter reprinted by Currie, James, ed., The Works of Robert Burns (Liverpool 1800), v. II, p. 259. Stuart is identified as the writer from Currie's MS. list printed in The Burns Chronicle, 1933. Irving, in Lives of the Scottish Poets (v. II, pp. 431, 432) quotes the letter from Currie.

pieces of poetry, which appeared in the public journals with the signature of Claudero. Fergusson presented himself to the curious gaze of the Dumfries wits, in rather a strange plight. His person and dress were in the greatest disorder: he wore, instead of a coat, a short white flannel jacket; and having performed the journey on foot, was all over dust. He seemed for all the world like a recruit after a long march, instead of the gay minstrel, "on pleasure bent." He apologized for his dishabille by saying, that his friend and himself had taken rather sudden leave of "Auld Reikie;" they had been carousing together the preceding night, and after leaving the tavern at peep of morn, had indulged in some such pranks as those so pleasantly related in the epilogue spoken by Mr. Wilson, in the character of an Edinburgh Buck.

"Fergusson for valour's dazzling sun
Up to his bright meridian had run,
And like renowned Quixote and his squire,
Sports and adventures were our sole desire.

* * * * *

Now had they borrow'd Argus' eyes, who saw us,
All was made dark and desolate as chaos;
Lamps tumbled after lamps, and lost their lustres,
Like doomsday when the stars shall fall in clusters.
Let fancy paint what dazzling glory grew,
From chrystal gems, when Phoebus came in view;
Each shatter'd orb ten thousand fragments strews,
And a new Sun in every fragment shews."

To end their frolic, or, perhaps, to escape its consequences, Fergusson proposed, that without going home, they should start off to Dumfries, on a visit to their old friend Charlie Salmon. The challenge was readily accepted, and away they hied. Salmon, proud of his visitor, introduced him to all the admirers of genius about Dumfries, in whose society he found quite another Edinburgh, of high delight and ruinous excess. His reminiscence of the banks of the Nith was however of a different sort from that of the Fifan Plains...³

3. Lives of Scottish Poets By The Society of Ancient Scots (London 1822), Part IV, pp. 74, 75.

Salmon had been apprenticed to Ruddiman in Edinburgh and later he had gone to Dumfries to work in the printing shop of Robert Jackson. Among his own unpublished works was a poem, Auld Reikie, which may have given Fergusson some inspiration for his poem of the same name. Later Salmon joined the Army and was with the Seaforth Highlanders when they mutinied and held a position atop Arthur's Seat. Eventually he went to India and was not heard of again.⁴ Fergusson probably knew Salmon either through Ruddiman or through his theatrical connections, since Salmon's parents worked at the Theatre.

The outcome of that long walk was the Verses on Dumfries, published in The Dumfries Weekly Magazine of 28 September. A young apprentice in the printing shop, John Mayne, received a copy of these verses in manuscript from the poet, which he, Fergusson's immediate chronological successor, treasured and preserved.⁵ Mayne supplied the anonymous biographer of

4. Part III, pp. 169-179.

5. Part IV, p. 75. Still another manuscript was extant in 1811 and was placed in the appendix (pp. 7-9) of Elizabeth Isabella Spence's volumes, Sketches of the Present Manners, Customs, and Scenery of Scotland (London 1811). Mayne eulogized Fergusson in his work The Siller Gun, and also in a poem which appeared in The Weekly Magazine of 14 April 1779.

Fergusson in Lives of Scottish Poets with the account of the Dumfries journey.

We have already encountered Arthur Masson in an earlier chapter. As were a number of the poet's friends, he was considerably older than Fergusson. It is very significant that Fergusson's scholarly gifts could command the respect of such a man, because Masson was a person of some stature, being a teacher of English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. After teaching in Aberdeen and Glasgow, in 1754 he came to Edinburgh and opened a school at the head of Covenant Close. Among his certifications, he could show recommendations from Diderot and Alembert. One of his chief occupations was the Anglicization of Scotsmen, in which he followed the school of Thomas Sheridan. Having published a number of textbooks for the use of his students, he included in one of them, A Collection of Prose and Verse (Edinburgh 1777), Fergusson's poem On Night, its first appearance in print.⁶

6. Mr. Alexander Law has supplied me with copious information on Masson. He notes that R. M. Lawrance (Two Burns Vignettes, Aberdeen 1922) identifies Masson's father as a merchant, but that Masson himself stated his father was a professor of French at Aberdeen University (Courant, 12 November 1763). Mr. Law also amends Lawrance's list of Masson's works: An English Spelling Book (Edinburgh [1757]), A Collection of Prose and Verse (Edinburgh, many editions from the 1760's through the 90's), Receuil de Pièces Choies (Edinburgh 1766), and Rudiments of the Italian Language (1771).

The Reverend William Greenlaw, mentioned earlier along with Masson, found a place in Fergusson's Last Will:

Let honest Greenlaw be the staff
On which I lean for Epitaph.
And that the Muses at my end
May know I had a learned friend,
Whatever of character he's seen
In me through humour or chagrin,
I crave his genius may narrate in
The strength of Ciceronian Latin.

Greenlaw, a celibate, did not follow the profession for which he had been trained, but, as Masson, was a teacher. He was distinguished by a lively sense of humor. Unfortunately, he did not outlive the poet to write that Ciceronian epitaph.⁷

In the Will are also mentioned Jamie Rae and John Hamilton, procurators; Tulloch, a wine merchant; and [Alexander?]

Oliphant, "poor Oliphant, who disappeared some years ago, and was never heard of; he also was a poet. His poems, so far as I know, were never collected for publication."⁸ He

may have known Oliphant from High School days. Finally,

Archibald Burnet, who later went to India, is on the High School lists for Fergusson's time. Was he a friend, too? One suspects that he was.

7. Calédonian Mercury (2 July 1774): "On Sunday last [26 June], died here, Mr William Greenlaw, preacher of the Gospel..."

8. Campbell, p. 299.

Sometimes it is our enemies who have the most penetrating things to say about us. Often they are right, too, for enemies are always critics. I do not know whether Philanthropus was a particular enemy of Fergusson, but certainly he was a sharp and valid critic, and in the absence of a Ciceronian epitaph, we had best turn to him:

"A Character, Addressed to a Friend.

THAT Tom's a wit, we must acknowledge,
For gibes and jests he throws about;
That Tom has been at school and college,
His learning leaves no room for doubt.

Blest with a quick and lively fancy,
His humour charms the social band;
The smartest things with ease he can say,
For words he's never at a stand.

Tom too (to all his other merit)
Can sing a loud and merry strain;
To 'keep it up' with taste and spirit,
He'll chorus till he sweat again.

Distinguish'd by the Muses favour,
He's stil'd the Laureat of the town;
Even G---n uses his endeavour
By praising Tom to gain renown.

To show that Tom is merely human,
And errs as other mortals do,
He has his whims, and not a few, man,
Of faults and little foibles too.

Tho' Tom is young--yea, almost beardless--
Surrounded with the gay and fair,
Of dress he's slovenly regardless,
Wears dirty shirts, nor combs his hair.

9. Weekly Magazine, 10 December 1771. Benjamin (p. 46) was first to reprint these verses, though in a slightly variant form.

Of boon companions and acquaintance,
 Tom's taste's not high, nor over nice;
 Headstrong, he seldom feels repentance,
 Nor mends upon a friend's advice.

But (to conclude this listless poem),
 Wou'd Tom this honest council take,
 Then grandeur wou'd be proud to know him,
 And to reward his worth awake.

O'er all the talents of his mind,
 Let prudence sit the steady pilot;
 To virtue be his wit confin'd,
 And never more let vice defile it.

Let Tom in decent dress appear,
 Beneath a poet's notice is it
 To ornament with taste and care
 The Temple which the Muses visit.

Philanthropus."

Edin. Nov. 14.⁹

This picture is adequately perceptive of some aspects of

Fergusson's Edinburgh life, so that it can be passed without
 comment.

* * *

Fergusson's disregard of conventions was one of the traits
 which made him socially attractive to certain of his friends.

His approach to life was manic and some of the stories which
 illustrate this, such as the first one following, do not have

9. Weekly Magazine, 10 December 1772. McDiarmid (p. 46) was
 first to reprint these verses, though in a slightly variant
 form.

the ring of truth; yet there is an underlying validity. If Fergusson had not had the reputation of being a "character," the stories would not have been told.

"Mr Fergusson had a rooted aversion to every kind of hypocrisy, especially religious hypocrisy. Those who pretended to an extraordinary outward show of religion, he tortured with much severity of ridicule. Among others of this stamp, he considered his landlord as one worthy of his particular attention; and he gave him now and then a little seasonable chastisement[.] His landlord was a man as religiously attached to his bottle as to his prayers; and though almost every night he was pretty much overcome by the first, he never neglected the last. This conduct Mr Fergusson could not long observe, without giving him some correction. One night, when the landlord had called his household together, and in a state of complete intoxication, was proceeding to prayer, Robert took his station in an adjoining closet. The landlord had no sooner fallen upon his knees, and uttered the words, O Lord, thou art good and gracious! than Mr Robert, from the closet, in a hollow tone of voice, re-echoed his words. The landlord being much agitated by this secret assistant, did not venture to proceed farther, till he had fully ascertained his personal safety. Having satisfied himself on this point, he uttered the next sentence with tremulous gravity: it was again re-echoed by the invisible being, in a more dismal tone. From these unhallowed responses, the landlord terminated his evening devotion, and gave orders to his servants to retire and carry awa' the buiks[.] After composing himself, by serious reflection, he recalled his servants, and earnestly enquired if Rabbie Fergusson was come home? being answered in the affirmative, (for by this time Robert had escaped from his concealment), the landlord proceeded to lecture his auditors on the impropriety of their past conduct; telling them, that he was certain, from what had happened that night and other forewarnings, there was something wrong, and that some awful calamity would befall [sic] the family; warning them of their danger, and cautioning them against all loose disorderly behaviour in future. Having thus, as he imagined, fortified those under his care, by his prophetic visitation, his inward terror, heightened by guilt, suggested to him the necessity of consulting his own safety, by some salutary advice: and having, on former occasions, had some

share of Robert's friendly admonitions, he ventured to communicate to him the events of the evening, and the terrors which oppressed his mind in consequence of them. Rabby was prepared to receive him with all the gravity of a father-confessor. The landlord gave a full narration of the events, and of his own fears; which were wonderfully increased by Robert's solemn commentaries. He represented to the terrified landlord, the danger he had to apprehend from attempting to address his Maker in a state of intoxication, and that he had reason to expect some serious affliction from the impropriety of his conduct. The landlord acknowledged his guilt, and promised amendment in future. Upon this acknowledgment and promise, Robert absolved him, and recommended a night's rest as the most proper exercise for one in his condition.

"Notwithstanding, however, of this supposed preternatural warning, and the promise of amendment, it was not long before the landlord relapsed into his usual habits; for, on the Saturday following, he came into his shop, at a late hour, almost incapable of attending to any thing. Robert was there, and after censuring him more severely than before, determined on playing him some other trick. An opportunity immediately offered, it was embraced. A customer sent for a sight of some goods, which the landlord packed up, and carried to the person's house. Robert, somewhat disguised, followed at a distance; waited concealed till the landlord came out; and, at a proper place, snatched away the goods, and left him to find the way home the best way he could. With the parcel, he reached the shop first, and having concealed it in a snug corner, was standing at his ease. The landlord, upon his return, wonderfully magnified the circumstances of the robbery, but seemed thankful that he was permitted to escape with life. Robert sympathised in his sorrows and joy, and all the family joined in the gratulations usual on such occasions. The next day being Sunday, a profound silence was observed by all parties; and by Monday morning Robert had made the servants acquainted with what he had done, and his reasons for doing it. At the same time, he prepared a few lines, as from a most noted woman of bad fame, addressed to the landlord, intimating to him his irregular conduct in coming to her house in a disorderly manner, leaving his goods, seemingly incapable of taking care of himself; and adding, that from his years, and the character he ought to support, she was unwilling to expose him, and had returned his goods, with her friendly advice, That he would be careful

1. Peterkin, pp. 36-41.

2. pp. 41-42.

in future not to expose himself. Robert watched the landlord's approach, put the parcel of goods and note into his hands, and as the note was unsealed, the landlord naturally concluded, that all in the shop had perused it. He stood amazed; and returning the note to Fergusson, declared his innocence, earnestly requesting that the matter might be concealed. Robert gravely perusing the note, seemed astonished at its contents, but would not listen to the landlord's plea of innocence. He told him, he had no intention of injuring him, by publishing the affair; and strongly recommended to him to profit by the friendly advice which the note contained; for he evidently saw, that in his intoxication, he neither knew where he had been, what he did, nor what was done to him. Many similar tricks and frolics Mr Fergusson engaged in, with a view to reclaim his landlord from the cup, but it is believed without success. In other respects the landlord was a good sort of man, and Mr Fergusson expressed a great regard for him. What was very singular too, the landlord was always giving Rabby (as he called him) his best advice against wildness; seasoning his advice with religious injunctions..."¹

In another anecdote, Fergusson's sense of humor seems crude or twisted by our standards:

"Mr Fergusson seemed so violent against fanatics, and fanatical opinions and practices, that he seldom missed an opportunity of exposing those who were in any degree of this character. One Sunday, when passing by a Glassite meeting-house, he heard the congregation praising the Lord with all their might; and knowing somewhat of their evening practice of love feasts, &c. he placed himself on a stone adjoining the house, took a slip of paper and pencil from his pocket, and wrote some lines, in imitation of their canting jargon, which he carefully folded up, and threw in at an open window to those assembled..."²

A story which Chambers tells may be a variation of the last:

On another occasion, Fergusson went, with some companions, to the door of a similar zealot [a Glassite], and began to

1. Peterkin, pp. 36-41.
2. pp. 41-42.

whine forth a psalm in burlesque of the hypocritical habits (as he considered them) of those within.³

A tale concerning Fergusson's powers of mimicry is certainly apocryphal:

"...During Mr Fergusson's expeditions to the country (of which he was very fond), he was daily engaged in some harmless frolic or humorous adventure. One day he somehow procured a sailor's habit, of the coarsest kind, in which he dressed himself; and, with a huge stick in his hand, he visited a great number of his acquaintances. He was so effectually disguised, that few or none of them knew him; and, by acquainting many of them with some of their former transactions and conduct, he so much surprised them, that they imputed his knowledge to divination. By this means he procured from many of them such a fund of information, as enabled him to give them a greater surprise, when he resumed the genuine character of Robby Fergusson. For in the sailor's habit, he informed them of many frailties and failings, that they imagined impossible for one of his appearance to know; and in the habit of Robby Fergusson, he divulged many things which they believed none but the ragged sailor was acquainted with."⁴

* * *

Philanthropus has told us that talents such as Fergusson's did not fail to attract the "fair." Beyond that, we have one other indication that Fergusson had formed associations with women. It is not uncommon for a person of his mental condition--surely manic-depressive--to find himself very little attracted to feminine companions.⁵ The single connection we know of was,

3. Chambers, p. 305.

4. Peterkin, p. 42.

5. Dr. Elizabeth Makkay of Boston, Massachusetts, forwarded this information.

however, ardent on the part of Damon and perhaps distressingly flattering for Stella.⁶

The first public mention of Stella was in the poem The Complaint: A Pastoral, published in the 1773 edition of Fergusson's poems. In this Damon (the author, or Fergusson) bemoans his unsuccessful suit, the fact that Stella's eyes "requite" him "with scorn," and delivers the opinion that he is about to die for love. It is, of course, the shepherd allegory. This would have remained meaningless to us if, in The Weekly Magazine of 3 November 1774, "C. K." (Dr. Charles Keith of Montrose) had not printed An Attempt towards a Pastoral Elegy to the Memory of Mr. Robert Fergusson. In his Attempt, he castigated Edinburgh people for their failure to mourn the poet.⁷

This was answered by Stella herself two weeks later in the same magazine, 17 November: On Mr Robert Fergusson. By a Lady. She still mourns "young Corydon," even though she is

6. McDiarmid (pp. 30, 31) first brought the Damon-Stella affair to light. It is, as he has told me, not the most important part of his valuable book on Fergusson, but it is very significant to a biographer grubbing for all details of the poet's life and attempting to understand his personality.

7. See Appendix L for the C. K.--Stella poems.

married:

For myself I will answer with truth
 Altho' it is twelve years and more
 Since wedlock did join me (in youth)
 To a swain that I love and adore.

Yet surely I may be allowed
 Young Corydon's death to bemoan;
 For amongst a numerous crowd
 I am not dejected alone.

Further, she reveals that Fergusson had helped her in the composition of poetry, but now she is determined to give up poetry and discard what they wrote together. Night and day she visits his grave. The poem is signed, "Edin. Nov. 7, Stella."

A poetical correspondence ensued between Stella and C. K. In The Weekly Magazine of 24 November, C. K. apologizes for his earlier accusation and suggests that they visit the grave together: "We would scorn suspicion's dark brow." He further advises Stella not to throw away those pieces of poetry with which Fergusson had helped her, but to publish them. In her next poem (1 December), Stella agrees that they should mourn together at the grave, and she would welcome a platonic relationship with C. K. based on their mutual feeling for Fergusson; she disdains "suspicion's green

eye."

How well did young Corydon know
 These virtuous friendships to prize;
 Nor car'd he what malice did flow
 From their tongues, or from Argus's eyes.

'Tis the virtuous soul I admire,
 And none can these feelings reprove;
 When free from all earthly desire,
 'Tis that alone I call love.

C. K. answers (15 December) in the same feeble kind, praising Stella's virtues and platonic friendship. A week later Stella finally obliges C. K.'s earlier request and presents a poem with which Fergusson had helped her, A Pastoral Dialogue, on parting with a female friend. This poem treats of a friend's going to England, of the loss of her (Stella's) child, and of the passion of Damon (Fergusson) for her.⁸ That is the end of the correspondence, although on 27 April 1775 another of Stella's poems appeared: "Lovely Damon, when thou'rt near me,/Straight my vital spirits fly... Desist, dear youth, nor strive to gain/A heart which is not mine to give..." And on 16 March 1775 she addressed

8. This poem cannot contain much of Fergusson's revision, since it is very amateurish metrically. It seems, too, that at least one part of it was composed at a late date, because its penultimate speech shows an influence from C. K.'s poem of 15 December.

a poem To an Absent Husband.---Ovid's Stile.⁹

More of C. K.'s work appeared in The Weekly Magazine and it is by The Farmer's Ha', also signed "C. K." (Weekly Magazine, 30 December 1774), that we identify him as Charles Keith.

Though we do not have Stella's name, we have a certain amount of information by which we can proceed to seek her out: in 1774 she had been married above twelve years. Both she and her husband ("a swain") are to be considered comparatively young. She had lost a child, and a friend of hers had gone to England. She was a poetess. Fergusson wooed her, though he must have been at least ten or twelve years younger than she; he probably had tried to assail her virtue--a platonic relationship of that temperature is quite inconceivable.

Now, let us for a moment look elsewhere in Fergusson's work for a hint of an affair. There are two:

9. Another poem by Stella appears in The Weekly Magazine of 13 December 1774. McDiarmid (p. 31) identifies a poem in the Courant, 12 November 1774, as by the same hand, because it is signed "Stella." That was a very common pseudonym, however, and the poem is a witty piece professedly by an unmarried woman seeking a husband; its style is superior to that of Damon's Stella. In view of its place on the front page of the Courant, the poem probably was reprinted from the London newspapers. A similarly facetious poem, signed "Stella," appeared in the Courant of 24 August 1774 and the Advertiser of 26-30 August 1774.

Tho' Mary's hand his nebb supplies,
 Unkend to hunger's painfu' cries,
 Ev'n beauty canna chear the heart
 Frae life, frae liberty apart.

Ode to the Gowdspink

O nature! canty, blyth and free,
 Whare is there keeking-glass like thee?
 Is there on earth that can compare
 Wi' Mary's shape, and Mary's air...

Auld Reikie

The fact that Mary appears twice as a symbol is significant; she may well be Stella.¹ For instance, in Auld Reikie she intrudes herself in a very illogical manner. She is really dragged in by the heels. But it is in the Ode that her presence is the most significant. She is the mate of the gowdspink and comes in a paragraph which describes the blessings of liberty. The gowdspink, in the person of the poet, brings her food. At this point a pun is very obvious. The word "nebb" means both a bird's bill or a pen point. And the gowdspink supplies "Mary's hand" and not her "mou," as would be expected. In other words, the poet means that his pen is "supplying," or aiding, Mary in her poetry.

So in seeking the classical Stella, we must also watch for a vernacular Mary and assume that they may be one and the

1. See the Cumming MSS. at Edinburgh.
 1. Professor W. L. Renwick made this suggestion to me.

same person.¹ Unless, of course, Fergusson helped a number of ladies with poetic composition. It is my preference to think that they are one and the same: surely Fergusson could never have used the name Stella in a vernacular poem; he would have had to change it.

Henrietta Cummyng, sister to James, had a circle of ladies around her who were interested in poetry.² Among this group must have been Cummyng's wife, Marion Dallas. She had married, when she was young, one Andrew Buckney, but she was soon after left a widow. Her marriage to James Cummyng took place on 2 August 1761,³ and, in the light of eighteenth century attitudes, we can assume that her remarriage was a testimonial to her personal attractiveness. By late 1774 Stella's lines, "Altho it is twelve years and more/Since wedlock did join me (in youth)/To a swain that I love and adore..." could very easily apply to her.

The name Marion suggests Mary. The twelve years of marriage, poetry circle, and presumable attractiveness also suggest that Marion Dallas Cummyng was Stella-Mary. And to strengthen that argument, it is only logical to suppose that

heart such as his was undoubtedly capable of the finest emotions

2. See the Cumming MSS. at Edinburgh University.

3. Edinburgh Marriage Register 1751-1800.

other conventions which Fergusson wanted to cast aside. What is most interesting psychologically is that Fergusson chose a woman so much older than himself.

Fergusson's inamorata would necessarily be the wife of a friend, an Edinburgh friend, who would not likely be suspicious. Other details cannot be supplied: the loss of a child, the friend's departure to England; but for the first of them, the Cummyngs did have children and the infant mortality rate then was high.

If that conclusion is not convincing, we must go on investigating poetesses with trusting husbands. It is an enticing mystery in which to attempt a solution. Poetic liaisons of poets and poetesses are an inheritance from beyond the days of Dante and his Beatrice, and there is the possibility that this particular one really was platonic. It is possible to call to mind other poetic loves of that century which only occasionally got out of hand. Stella viewed this affair as a convention, as courtly love. Older than Fergusson by twelve years at least, she desired to be the bright star of his literary galaxy--a mature, guiding, worshipped ideal. Her emotions, she thought, were on that stellar level of pure intellectualism. But what of Robert's when he was not being Damonesque? His Scots Mary was no convention. Though a heart such as his was undoubtedly capable of the finest emotions of love, Stella's poetry leaves us feeling that there were other conventions which Fergusson wanted to cast aside. What is most interesting psychologically is that Fergusson chose a woman so much older than himself.

CHAPTER NINE

The Daft Days was published in The Weekly Magazine of 2 January 1772. Though a dialect poem, it did not represent Fergusson's debut as a creative artist in Scots. He had not accepted a new creed, nor had he abandoned his English vapidities. Many months were to pass before he would discover where his talent lay: 1772 seems to have been an experimental year.

Nevertheless The Daft Days was skillfully wrought. A true artist rarely scribbles; however lightly Fergusson considered his subject, the work produced was a finished piece. For the public it filled a gap in contemporary Scottish letters, for although there was no dearth of Scots poetry about, not since Ramsay's time had any work of quality been offered to them. Consequently, Fergusson's Scots verse was instantly popular, even though his readers would no more accept his first Scots poems as a serious creative effort than he would himself. Later on, when the poet had grown serious about his Scots work, his public still failed to appreciate its deep significance.

Dialects, the very heartbeats of our language, are never in favor. Few educated persons would hazard using their

colloquial dialects in everyday speech, even among their own countrymen. A scholar who reveres a dialect poet two hundred years dead will smile at the work of a modern dialect poet without bothering to consider its content. And, for that matter, the modern dialect poet will speak in a tongue different from that in which he writes. Our language has, for better or for worse, become slightly sterilized.

In the linguistic chronology of Scotland, Fergusson appeared at what must be considered the end of a transition: the time of the rejection of Scots dialect by the educated classes and their acceptance of literary English speech. With the coming of the Union in 1707, there was increased intercourse between the English and the Scots. Scotland's politicians, her nobility, and her intelligentsia began to wander South, and they were shamed into the abandonment of a rich dialect. There was little rebellion: the Scottish nature rather inclined itself to the beating of the English on their own home fields. "Whaur's your Wullie Shakespeare noo?" was the cry of a nation determined not to be taken over, but to take over.

At the same time that a proportion of Scotland's population was polishing itself in London, Scots at home

began to sense their inadequacies. The diffusion of English books, Johnson's publication of a purely literary dictionary which contained no Scots words, the improved transportation in both directions, and many other factors compelled upper class Scotsmen to succumb to a greater or lesser degree of standardization. In the history of our language there has been no mania quite like that of the Scots learning English in the eighteenth century. English teachers infiltrated the Capital of the North. The greatest of them was Thomas Sheridan (actually an Irishman), who came to Edinburgh in June 1761.¹ He announced his classes of instruction and the forthcoming publication of his "Rhetorical Grammar" designed so that "the natives of Scotland may be taught, with but little difficulty, according to the method there laid down, to speak the English tongue with such purity, as not easily to be distinguished from the most polite and

1. Courant, 13 June 1761: "On Wednesday last Mr. Sheridan arrived in town; and, we hear, he intends to begin his Course of Lectures on Elocution early in the week after next." The lectures were given at St. Paul's Chapel in Skinner's Close on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. The fee was a half guinea for six evenings of instruction.

2. Advertiser, 1764.

3. Advertiser, 27 November-1 December 1772.

4. Sommerville, p. 4.

best educated natives of England."² There were also those Scots who undertook the teaching of English with even more thoroughness than the English linguistic missionaries. A Mr. Telfer took "great care...that no Scotch be spoken" in his school.³ Fergusson's friends, Woods and Masson, were well-known teachers of English. By the end of the century, the individualistic Scot who refused to sell his bounteous birthright for a mess of English pottage was certain to be known as a "character."

It is obvious that Fergusson, too, reacted to the southern influence, for he had placed his early poetic faith in English. In his own informal circles, however, his language was Scots, and his friends "found in him an uncommon flow of Hudibrastic humour, expressed in the peculiar dialect of his native country."⁴ Not only was he a Scots speaker; he also had a deep interest in the colloquial accents of Scotland. This is best seen in his poetry; it is sufficient here to remind the reader of Fergusson's varied habitations: Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeenshire, and St. Andrews,

2. Courant, 23 June 1764.

3. Advertiser, 27 November-1 December 1772.

4. Sommers, p. 4.

all areas which have appreciably different vocabularies and pronunciations.⁵

But the English-Scottish duality which faced Fergusson was not on the linguistic level alone. In his poetry it was a matter of opposing traditions. One proud part of Scotland which hung on heartily despite the social atmosphere was her folk tradition. It manifested itself in the indiscriminate song collections of James Watson and Allan Ramsay. It was fed from time to time by the Sempills, by Pennecuik, and by the anonymous songmakers of the people. Moreover, it held the feeble remains of the old Scots artistic tradition of Douglas, Dunbar, Henryson, Montgomery, and others. That artistic tradition had all but died, perhaps with Drummond of Hawthornden who could not stem the tide of the Shakespeare-Spenser-Milton ascendancy. This twin tradition of Scotland was unEnglish: Douglas and Henryson bear a universal appeal, but each of them represents something which is unique in the Scottish nature; as to the folk "literature," at no point can the bawdily virile or the profoundly gentle songs of the

5. In S. G. Smith's Robert Fergusson is an excellent essay covering Fergusson's language (by A. D. Mackie, pp. 123 ff.). It would serve no purpose for me to repeat the details or to attempt a like study when something so much better is readily available.

North be compared with those of the South. At least a part of the twin tradition was alive in Fergusson's time. He had experienced its folk aspects among the people both of the city and of the country; on the academic level, he was aware of the elaborate artistic heritage.

And opposed to this national literary heritage was the English tradition which Fergusson at first thought to be his medium. What was the English tradition? It was certainly a greater one than the Scots, but in the last half of the eighteenth century the bulk of English poetry had slumped to a monotonous routine of form and content. (There were, of course, many exceptions.) Unless a poet could innovate, he found little scope. He was forced to treat the same themes, to use the same words or combinations of words, and to employ the same essential forms. Very few poets were able to wrench themselves free from those shackles.

Struggling with dead forms and with a second-hand knowledge of English, Fergusson surely could not hope for much success. When he turned to his native literary tradition, a door was opened. Here he used the tongue of which he was master, and that tongue in turn stimulated a series of familiar subjects and a flow of natural spirits. But most

important, the tradition was alive. Certain subjects and forms of treatment were suitable to it, and a poet of genius could give these subjects and treatments universality. It is ridiculous to think that Fergusson's emergence depended upon language alone: had he been born in the seventeenth century or in the nineteenth century, times when he would have had more freedom, he might have made his genius known with equal facility and without dialect. His use of Scots is twofold: in poems which are of the Scottish literary tradition, and in poems of the English literary tradition; the latter are usually the weaker of the two. It is well to remember that the Scots tongue can be used to cover a bad poem, because it temporarily limits its critics; examples abound. Only when a poet really has an idea to express, in a manner native and comfortable to him, will his poems survive for a hundred and eighty years and more.

* * *

The "daft days" are the Christmas and New Year holidays, celebrated in Scotland with uncommon zest and wildness. In selecting a purely local subject for a poetic essay, Fergusson naturally relied upon Scots as his medium. The Daft Days is diffuse and suffers the fault often found in Fergusson's

work, which is a lack of organization and definite progression. Nevertheless its individual verses and stanzas reflect a polished gleam. The poem is more like a lyric than an exposition.

In describing Scotland's gloomy winter season, Fergusson has initial difficulty in drawing away from his pastorals:

From naked groves nae birdie sings,
To shepherd's pipe nae hillock rings,

but gradually he is able (even in near-English wording) to enter his theme in unborrowed terms:

Mankind but scanty pleasure glean
Frae snawy hill or barren plain,
Whan Winter, 'midst his nipping train,
Wi' frozen spear,
Sends drift ower a' his bleak domain,
And guides the weir.

Then the poet approaches that which is really familiar to him, conveying to his reader the sensual comforts of Edinburgh:

Auld Reikie! thou'rt the canty hole,
A bield for mony a cauldrie saul,
Wha snugly at thine ingle loll,
Baith warm and couth;
While round they gar the bicker roll
To weet their mouth.

A true Scottish poem begins with that stanza, and there follows a succession of random sketches of daft exhilaration and of those having part in the celebrations. The browster wives, the fiddlers, the City Guard all assure the reader that the

poet is at home. He slides backward in his penultimate stanza with his use of standard poetry-words: "social cheer," "blithesome innocence." But he rescues his work in the final stanza in praise of whiskey and his invocation to its god to be prepared "To hedge us frae that black banditti,/The City-Guard." The two significant points about the poem are Fergusson's application of "standard habbie" to material not elegiac, and the preponderance of Scots language in stanzas which are wholly Scottish in their content. This does not mean that the Scots stanzas are localized; on the contrary, they assume a deep reality and sincerity, a specific approach to universal human exhilaration. It is an emphatic example of the content influencing the language and not of the Scots tongue influencing the poet. The fumbling inadequacies in parts of the poem are more than excusable in that its author had very little literary precedent for high quality expression of ideas in "standard habbie." He was putting the stanza form to a new use,⁶ and he probably did not look upon the poem as too serious an

7. MacLaine, Allan Hugh, *Robert Fergusson: A Critical Study* (London, 1908), p. 140. In *Anstey's Guide*, see *The Birth of Fashion*. Burns was influenced by the poem, one evidence of it being his application of the name "Clarinda" to

6. Ramsay had broadened the use of "habbie," but his abilities were limited. See Keith, "Robert Fergusson," *The Thistle*, v. 5, 1913).

Fashion, A Poem, written 8 February 1772 (Weekly Magazine, 27 February), was a regression to the English. It is not an important poem: using the allegorical figure of Fashion, Fergusson attacks the ladies of Britain for their lack of patriotism in absorbing degenerate foreign fashions. He may be indebted to Bruce's Ode to Women for the idea, or perhaps to Anstey's New Bath Guide.⁷

The tidings of the triumph of The Daft Days soon reached its author. There is evidence, as we shall see, that the Scots poems were quick to bring Fergusson a new and interested audience. These were, it must be remembered, the first Scots poems which had appeared in The Weekly Magazine, and their very novelty, as well as their inherent freshness, would have an explosive effect. The poet attempted to equal his performance in Elegy on the Death of Scots Music (5 March). It is, without doubt, his worst composition in "standard habbie." He has self-consciously dressed an abstract idea in Scots words and Scots verse form, but very little of the

7. MacLaine, Allan Hugh, Robert Fergusson: A Critical Study (MS.), p. 140. In Anstey's Guide, see The Birth of Fashion. Burns was influenced by the poem, one evidence of it being his application of the name "Clarinda" to Mrs. Maclehorse: "The wealthy, young and gay Clarinda..." (Leask, William Keith, "Robert Fergusson," The Thistle, v. 5, 1913).

work is Scottish. As a poet, Fergusson is most at ease with things and their attendant ideas, not ideas alone. When he comes to deal with MacGibbon, a celebrated violinist of his time, he is reminded again of Habbie Simson's Epitaph and is able to write two good stanzas, one of which follows:

Ilk carline now may grunt and grane,
Ilk bonny lassie make great mane,
Since he's awa', I trow de'il ane [var. there's nane]
Can fill his stead;
The blythest sangster on the plain!
Alake, he's dead!

Another stanza which stands out with a lilting Scottishness in May was Conscience, An Elegy (7 May). While one might

Can lav'rocks at the dawning day,
 Can linties chirming frae the spray,
 Or todling burns that smoothly play
 O'er gowden bed,
 Compare wi' Birks of Indermay?
 But now they're dead.

All in all, the Elegy was a bad try: he conceived his subject from the level of words alone.

Several English poems followed. Retirement (2 April) was a hackneyed theme, but Fergusson's constant repetition of it is interesting. Again and again in his poetry, he expresses the contrast of city and country, chiefly in the light of healthfulness. His own physical condition and the unavoidable example of Edinburgh supply his inspiration. He

are exactly those which characterise the best of his later work. It was either written in order, or else it was the praising the "lowly cot" of the farmer, something he did much better in The Farmer's Ingle. On the Death of Mr. Thomas Lancashire, Comedian (16 April) came so shortly after the decease of its subject, that one wonders whether Fergusson did not welcome the excuse to write an amusing epitaph.⁸ Also in April he wrote Extempore, on seeing some stanzas to Mrs. Hartley, a reply to some verses which had been printed in the Courant of 1 April 1772. The only poem which appeared in May was Conscience, An Elegy (7 May). While one might hope to find some personal overtones, it is merely a conventional exercise.

But in June there was a pleasant surprise. The Weekly Magazine (4 June) carried The King's Birth-Day in Edinburgh. If any poem can be considered symbolic of Fergusson's advent in Scots, this is the poem. There is a hint of the full extent of the author's potentialities, and its basic ingredients

8. Courant, 15 April 1772: "Sunday last [12 April] died here Mr Thomas Lancashire, Comedian, much distinguished among his friends for his integrity of heart and entertaining manner; he greatly contributed to the happiness of every one, and his death is sincerely regretted [sic] by all who saw or knew him." Lancashire had been an actor, and the reference in Fergusson's poem is to his playing the gravedigger in Hamlet.

are exactly those which characterize the best of his later work. It was either written to order, or else it was the bastard offspring of the army of odes which appeared in honor of the date.⁹ Again it is "standard habbie," now employed exclusively in presenting a series of pictures. The Edinburgh scenes depicted are not the productions of a photographer; the poet bears an empathy with them. Full of his bracing surroundings, Fergusson even forsakes the classical Muse in his invocation:

O Muse, be kind, and dinna fash us
To flee awa' beyont Parnassus,
Nor seek for Helicon to wash us,
That heath'nish spring;
Wi' Highland whisky scour our hawses
And gar us sing.

The approach thereafter is broadside and disorganized. From Edinburg Castle a gun is fired at noon. It is not, laments the poet, Mons Meg, that ancient cannon which had been presented to James II in 1455 and which had so long served at the Castle:

Oh willawins! Mons Meg, for you,
'Twas firing crack'd thy muckle mou';
What black mishanter gart ye spew
Baith gut and ga'?
I fear they bang'd thy belly fu'
Against the law.

9. Particularly John Cunningham's A Birth-Day Ode. Fergusson often shows himself a disciple of Cunningham even more than of Shenstone, as was also the case with Burns.

Fergusson mocks them with generous affection:

Right seldom am I gi'en to bannin,
 But, by my saul, ye was a cannon,
 Cou'd hit a man, had he been stannin
 Wi' powder'd pow: In shire of Fife,
 Sax long Scots miles ayont Clackmanan,
 By hostile rambles An tak his life.

The warmth of the personification transforms the venerable piece of artillery into a being not unlike a middle-aged goodwife living on the High Street. It is facetiously humanized still further by the investing of a double meaning in the first stanza quoted. (To "bang the belly full" bears an off-color connotation in Scots ballads.) The next event of the day is the doling of a stipend, regularly paid on the King's birthday, to the "blue-gown bodies," the licensed beggars who wore a blue garment as a uniform of their calling. Those favorites of Fergusson's satire, the members of the City Guard, are never forgotten for long. The Guard was a military group of Highlanders obliged to keep the peace on such occasions as a king's birthday; they always appear as a pitiful handful of outsiders, newly descended from the hills, with a perplexed lack of understanding of the burghers' ebullience; indeed, many of them possessed only a rudimentary knowledge of English. While his fellow-townsmen took joy in harrying these despised soldiers,

1. To the Memory of Mr William Toshack, late Druggist in Perth, a poem signed "Clack" and dated 2 June, appeared in The Weekly Magazine of 11 June 1772.

Fergusson mocks them with generous affection:

On this great day, the city-guard,
In military art well lear'd,
Wi' powder'd pow, and shaven beard,
Gang thro' their functions,
By hostile rabble seldom spar'd
Of clarty unctions.

It is not difficult to comprehend why the City Guard would be needed. Dead cats "dragled thro' the pond" are thrown about:

The Muse maun also now implore
Auld wives to steek ilk hole and bore;
If baudrins slip but to the door,
I fear, I fear,
She'll no lang shank upon all-four
This time o' year.

A pastoral note ends the poem rather abruptly. That pastoral stanza is, however, Scots, so that nothing has interrupted the sustained Scottish theme of the poem. Here, for the first time, is complete originality and uniformity of subject and language. Here is the poem which justifies the experimentation of The Daft Days.

But with what amount of seriousness did Fergusson regard it? Was it made-to-order hack work? Probably so, for the next ambitious poem, The Simile: A Pastoral (25 June), was in English. The same medium was used for On the Death of Dr. Toshack of Perth, A Great Humorist (25 June);¹ Damon to

1. To the Memory of Mr William Toshack, late Druggist in Perth, a poem signed "Cleon" and dated 2 June, appeared in The Weekly Magazine of 11 June 1772.

his Friends, A Ballad (16 July); The Canongate Play-house
in Ruins (30 July); The Peasant, The Hen, and Young Ducks,
A Fable (13 August); and To Mr Guion, Comedian, for his
Panegyric on Dr W[alke]r, &c. (20 August).² Caller Oysters
(27 August), in "standard habbie," is illustrative of
Fergusson's vivacious appetites:

When big as burns the gutters rin,
Gin ye hae catcht a droukit skin,
To Luckie Middlemist's loup in,
And sit fu' snug
Oe'r oysters and a dram o' gin,
Or haddock lug.

Caller Oysters was again a work of sustained Scottish theme and language (though the idea once again is from Philips). With two such works to Fergusson's credit, it was inevitable that Scotland should recognize him. An unidentified "J. S." of Berwick praises Caller Oysters and The King's Birth-Day in a poem dated 31 August (Weekly Magazine, 3

2. Guion's panegyric:

On three eminent Clergymen

Cephas, Apollos, and the bright St. Paul,
Obeying fully the celestial call,

The saving words of Jesus did declare--
Listen we warmly to the glorious sound
Of Faith, Repentance, Grace, and Love profound!
Now preach'd by zealous Walker, Brown, and Blair!

3. Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 95) identifies F. J. Guion
"John Scott, a farmer." It appears with gross
(Weekly Magazine, 13 August 1772)

September).³ After some good Scots laudation in "standard published Braid Claith (25 October), a penetrating satire. habbie," J. S. invites Fergusson to visit him in Berwick. It is the most original treatment of a theme in all of his (In one line, "And your auld words sae meetly mingle," J. S. poetry, and often thought to be his best poem. An article indicates that Fergusson may have been using a vocabulary in The Weekly Magazine of 10 September had urged Scots to already archaic in his time.) The Answer to Mr. J. S.'s patronize the home broadcloth industry." Seizing upon the Epistle promptly appeared a week later (10 September). idea and conceiving a "philosophy of clothes," Fergusson Fergusson rejects, in modest tones, the praise of J. S., with trimmed his pen nebb to its sharpest: the slight admission that his Muse:

Ye wha are fain to hae your name
At times when she may lowse her pack,
I'll grant that she can find a knack,
To gar auld-warld wordies clack,
But hae ye weel In hamespun rhyme,
While ilk ane at his billie's back
Keeps gude Scots time.

He that aces eels o' this way fa', [var. They]
He anticipates a meeting between himself and J. S., but
Bide bauld to bear the green aw',
regrets that his legs are his only means of transportation
When hienly clad wi' shall fu' braw
and, therefore, J. S. should visit him in Edinburgh. The
background of this poetic correspondence, a flyting in reverse,
For he's a gook they're sure to geck at,
is the correspondence between Allan Ramsay and William
While he draws breath,
Hamilton of Gilbertsfield.arters are bedeckit
Wi' gude Braid Claith.

After On seeing a Lady paint herself (10 September) and That Fergusson was poorly dressed, either from carelessness Against Repining at Fortune (24 September), Fergusson took or from necessity, is a fact known to us. How personal was the advice that was implicit in J. S.'s compliments. He this philosophy to him? And were the two succeeding stanzas

3. Grosart, (Robert Fergusson, p. 98) identifies J. S. as

4. "John Scott, a farmer." It seems a wild guess.

published Braid Claith (15 October), a penetrating satire. It is the most original treatment of a theme in all of his poetry, and often thought to be his best poem. An article in The Weekly Magazine of 10 September had urged Scots to patronize the home broadcloth industry.⁴ Seizing upon the idea and conceiving a "philosophy of clothes," Fergusson trimmed his pen nebb to its sharpest:

Ye wha are fain to hae your name
 Wrote in the bonny book of fame,
 Let merit nae pretension claim
 To laurel'd wreath,
 But hap ye weel, baith back and wame,
 In gude Braid Claith.

He that some ells o' this may fa',
 An' slae-black hat on pow like snaw,
 Bids bauld to bear the gree awa',
 Wi' a' this graith,
 Whan bienly clad wi' shell fu' braw
 O' gude Braid Claith.

[var. They]

Waesuck for him wha has nae fek o't!
 For he's a gowk they're sure to geck at,
 A chiel that ne'er will be respekit
 While he draws breath,
 Till his four quarters are bedeckit
 Wi' gude Braid Claith.

That Fergusson was poorly dressed, either from carelessness or from necessity, is a fact known to us. How personal was this philosophy to him? And were the two succeeding stanzas

4. See Smith, S. G., Robert Fergusson, p. 93.

called up from some deep recess of his soul?

If ony mett'l'd stirrah grien [var. green]
 For favour frae a lady's ein,
 He mauna care for being seen
 Before he sheath
 His body in a scabbard clean
 O' gude Braid Claith.

For, gin he come wi' coat threed-bare, [var. thread-]
 A feg for him she winna care,
 But crook her bonny mou' fu' sair,
 An' scald him baith.
 Wooers shou'd ay their travel spare
 Without Braid Claith.

Always retaining his sense of humor, he nevertheless does not
 allow his quill to become blunted. We cannot escape the
 conviction that the meaning is autobiographical.

Braid Claith lends fock an unco heese, [var. fouk]
 Makes mony kail-worms butter-flees, [var. -flies]
 Gies mony a doctor his degrees
 For little skaith:
 In short, you may be what you please
 Wi' gude Braid Claith.

For thof ye had as wise a snout on
 As Shakespeare or Sir Isaac Newton,
 Your judgment fouk wud hae a doubt on,
 I'll tak my aith,
 Till they cou'd see ye wi' a suit on
 O' gude Braid Claith.

The maturity of the piece is astounding. Had it been written
 by an older poet with the world's tribulations scarred upon
 him, we should not wonder at it. For a youth of twenty-two,
 it is an uncommon utterance--or perhaps not so uncommon when

we consider the poet's unattainable aspirations and the talents of which he himself was well aware. The contrivance was not wholly new (see Dunbar's The Amendis to the Telyouris and Sowtaris⁵), but the unexpected subtlety and the force of the satire is undoubtedly personal.

An Eclogue to the Memory of Dr. William Wilkie, Late Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of St. Andrews (29 October) is an ambitious, but not a striking, work. Fergusson turned his Scots to an eclogue because it was a logical way in which to honor an agricultural experimenter. The precedents were Ramsay's eclogues and his Gentle Shepherd; the result is equally dull. We are moved only by the sincerity of the attempt. Sandie and Willie, An Eclogue, written at the same period, is a similar Theocritan effort, though its subject is a feebly humorous discussion of wives.

Hallow-fair (12 November) was more adventurous. The matter of it was a series of scenes such as had been the matter of The King's Birth-Day, but the simple "standard habbie," so suited to Scots poetry, was abandoned for a still more classical Scots form. Fergusson employed the stanza of Christis Kirk on

5. Available to Fergusson in Ramsay's Evergreen.

David Lindsay's One pleasant Satyre of the Three Estates and in Alexander Scott's The Jousting and Debate up at the Kram.

7. Caledonian Mercury, 11 November 1772.

No tribute to an eighteenth century Muse introduces the Fair; the Green and Peblis to the Play. Ramsay had used this stanza the literary link is directly to Christis Kirk and Peblis, and he had reprinted Christis Kirk and Peblis in The Evergreen; (The first line of the latter runs: "At Beltane quhen ilk bedd' bawnis...") The scenes and the folk come crowding out it.⁶ But Fergusson modified the rhyme (from a b a b a b a b c d as if they, too, were emerging from the apologetics of those to a b a b c d c d e) to allow himself more flexibility of expression, for the difficult stanza in its original form would certainly have restricted the easy flow of his poetry. In this form each scene has more room to itself; the short, economical, and anti-climactical effect of "standard habbie" did not allow the elbow room necessary for unity in a descriptive poem. The final short line of the stanza rounds off each part, not as a climax, but as a transition. The subject of the poem was All Hallows Fair, which had been held on 10 November;⁷ it was a yearly occasion, more native to Edinburgh than the King's birthday celebrations.

At Hallowmas, whan nights grow lang,
And starnies shine fu' clear,
Whan fock, the nippin cald to bang,
Their winter hap-warms wear,
Near Edinbrough a fair there hads,
I wat there's nane whase name is,
For strappin dames and sturdy lads,
And cap and stoup, mair famous
Than it that day.

developed a conception of "proper words in proper places."

6. The stanza had been used in France. It appears in Sir David Lindsay's Ane pleasant Satyre of the Three Estaitis and in Alexander Scott's The Jousting and Debate up at the Drum.

7. Caledonian Mercury, 11 November 1772.

No tribute to an eighteenth century Muse introduces the Fair;
the literary link is directly to Christis Kirk and Peblis.

(The first line of the latter runs: "At Beltane quhen ilk
bodie bownis...") The scenes and the folk come crowding out
as if they, too, were emerging from the agelessness of those
epics:

...the trig made maidens come
A sightly joe to seek

...

Here country John in bonnet blue,
And eke his Sunday's claise on,
Rins after Meg wi' rokelay new,
An' sappy kisses lays on;

...

Here chapmen billies tak their stand,
An' shaw their bonny wallies;
Wow, but they lie fu' gleg aff hand
To trick the silly fallows:

...

Here Sawny cries, frae Aberdeen;
"Come ye to me fa need:
The brawest shanks that e'er were seen
"I'll sell ye cheap an' guid..."

Aberdeen's chief industry was hosiery. Sawny speaks in
Aberdonian, an echo of Fergusson's background and his erudite
interest in the language he uses. By this time he had
developed a conception of "proper words in proper places,"
something he had not done in his first vernacular poems.

The City Guard also has its proper words:

A Highland aith the serjeant ga'e,
 "She maun pe see our guard."
 Out spak the weirlike corporal,
 "Pring in ta drunken sot."

A warning is given to the country folk:

Ye wives, as ye gang thro' the fair,
 O mak your bargains hooly!
 Of a' thir wylie louns beware,
 Or fegs they will ye spulzie,
 For fairn-year Meg Thamson got,
 Frae thir mischievous villains,
 A scaw'd bit o' penny note,
 That lost a score o' shillins
 To her that day.

The reference is to what was already a hackneyed sharper's ruse at the time. A trickster would surreptitiously drop a penny note in the path of an illiterate country fellow. The gull, accustomed only to hard cash, would pick up the unfamiliar piece of currency; then the sharper would pounce forward, claiming that he, too, had been about to pick it up. He would agree to settle for half of what he said was a note worth a pound or more, and the country fellow would unknowingly pay out from his own pocket for the worthless note.⁸ The poem is terminated with a now familiar admonition

8. But if Fergusson had a specific instance in mind, he may have been recalling a happening at a previous Hallow Fair. A woman had sold a cow for two pounds and had received two penny notes in payment.

to "bide yont frae" the City Guard:

The bell of the Iron Kirk was the timekeeper for Edinburgh,
 A wee soup drink dis unco weel
 ringing regular To had the heart aboon; and ten o'clock.
 Its gude as lang's a canny chiel [var. good]
 jangling at it Can stand steeve in his shoon. daily schedules.
 But gin a birkie's owr weel sair'd
 Fergusson's It gars him aften stammer dress to the supernatural,
 To pleys that bring him to the guard,
 his powers of An' eke the Council-chawmir, well into a plaguing
 Wi' shame that day.

The ingredients of Hallow-fair were an intensification of what
 had been used previously. The piece should impress us with
 Fergusson's direct connections to a pure Scottish tradition;
 his ability to master and to modify that tradition with ease
 is a signification of his development. He places himself more
 steadfastly in the lineage of the makars.

Epitaph on General Wolfe and Epigram on the Epitaphs for
General Wolfe appeared on 12 November along with Hallow-fair.
 A premium of £100 had been offered for the best epitaph. One
 of the epitaphs had been written by Charles Keith (Weekly
Magazine, 5 September 1772).

Hallow-fair had been a turning point. It was a serious
 expression in a classical Scots form, and, after its appearance,
 an increasing number of his most important works, of his most
 profound feelings, were clothed in native words and native
 meters. To the Tron-Kirk Bell (26 November) was again in Scots.

As a proof of the bell's supernatural powers, the poet has had a dream in which "Auld Nick" used one of his devices, "a wylie piece o' jargon," as he calls it, "to bewitch the bell, as it were, into a jangling at the inhabitants to keep to their daily schedules."⁹

Fergusson's flyting of it is like an address to the supernatural, his powers of personification turning the bell into a plaguing devil.

It is hoped that Wanwordy, crazy, dinsome thing,
As e'er was fram'd to jow or ring,
make the bell "What gar'd them sic in steeple hing
They ken themsel',
rock, / Whase lugs But weel wat I they coudna bring
War sounds frae hell.

On the What de'il are ye? that I shoud ban,
Die th Your neither kin to pat nor pan;
The by Nor uly pig, nor master-cann,
But weel may gie
M[a]ir pleasure to the ear o' man
Than stroak o' thee.

A warm and vital personification of the bell is made to achieve. It is not only a "wylie piece o' jargon" but is ready to suggest something watchful and moral instruction. We are made to feel the sound in our ears:

Your noisy tongue, there's nae abideint,
is ready to suggest Like scaulding wife's, there is nae guideint:
something watch Whan I'm 'bout ony bus'ness eident,
moral instruction, It's sair to thole;
To deave me, than, ye tak' a pride in't
Wi' senseless knoll.

...

strikes us most For whan I've toom'd the muckle cap,
funny does not An' fain wad fa' ovr in a nap,
17 October, was Troth I cud doze as sound's a tap,
already awarded the Wer't na for thee,
That gies the tither weary chap
To waukin me.

9. Butler, D., The Tron Kirk of Edinburgh (Edinburgh MCMVI), p. 218.

As a proof of the bell's supernatural relationships, the poet has had a dream in which "Auld Nick" owned the bell as one of his devices, "a wylie piece o' politic":

"As lang's my dautit bell hings there,

"A' body at the kirk will skair;

"Quo they, gif he that preaches there

"Like it can wound,

"We douna care a single hair

"For joyfu' sound."

It is hoped that the magistrates will agree with the poet and make the bell "tongue-tackit," so as to preserve the "honest fock,/Whase lugs were never made to dree/Thy doolfu' shock":

But far frae thee the bailies dwell,

Or they wud scunner at your knell,

Gie the foul thief his riven bell,

And than, I trow,

The by-word hads, "the de'il himsel'

"Has got his due."

A warm and vital personification in poetry is rare and difficult to achieve. It is best attained in humorous terms, for a reader is ready to suspend his disbelief for the sake of laughter, something which he is not prepared to do for the purpose of moral instruction. The humor here is of a surface quality; it is the profound affection for the things of Auld Reikie that strikes us most strongly. After all, a poet who is merely funny does not survive for long. Had not Guion, as early as 17 October, when only one real Edinburgh poem had been written, already awarded the laureateship?

There were only three more poems for The Weekly Magazine that year. Good Eating (17 December), another child of Fergusson's reading of John Philips, should be compared with Caller Oysters to give an appreciation of his Scottish attainments over his English. Its final lines, illustrative of the psychological tortures Fergusson suffered for his convivial life (this came, remember, in the Cape Club period), have personal significance. He seems reluctant to chance a look in at himself for fear of catching a sight of moral and physical ruin:

Let not Intemperance, destructive fiend!
Gain entrance to your halls.--Despoil'd by him,
Shall cloyed appetite, forerunner sad
Of rank disease, inveterate clasp your frame.

Watching, admonishing, as if he were his own strict guardian, glowering at himself objectively, he goes on with his drinking and with his warnings. Every repetition of that idea in his poetry is the picture of a soul divided, wracking itself, while the tides of life around it push it helplessly to destruction. It is a pathetic picture of sinewy, penetrating genius overpowered by weakling appetites. The Delights of Virtue and Character of a Friend, in an Epitaph which he desired the Author to Write were written at the end of the

the lengthy Good Eating by 17 December, the printing and

year and published in the 1 January 1773 issue of The Weekly Magazine. Two undated poems, Amidst a rosy bank of flowers and Where winding Forth adorns the vale, probably written in 1769, appeared in Neil Stewart's song collection of 1772-3.

A Tale, published first in the 1773 Poems, was a pointed linguistic satire concerning a pedant who maintained that the letter 'H' was merely a breathing and was therefore unnecessary. When he asked his servant to 'eat his meat, the servant, not regarding linguistic niceties, promptly ate it. The reference is to Masson and other Scottish English teachers who went so far as to demand the pronunciation of the 'K' in 'know'.

* * *

The decision to publish a volume of poems was premature. The body of good work was not large enough, and the failure of the project was predestined. But Fergusson felt there was already enough encouragement to go ahead with it, and so he did. The poem of latest date which appeared in the volume was Hallow-fair, so that the text must have been prepared between the second week in November and the last week in November, the date of the appearance of To the Tron-Kirk Bell, which was not included. Since there was sufficient time to write the lengthy Good Eating by 17 December, the printing and

and proofreading must have been completed shortly before then.

The Scots Magazine of December announced the publication:

"Poems, by Robert Fergusson. 2s. 6d. Drummond and Elliot."

Grosart made a number of errors concerning this volume of poems. He stated that Drummond and Elliot were announcing in the above advertisement that they were taking subscriptions for the Poems, and that the publication date was actually late 1773. He also wrote that he had seen the subscription papers "and against the names £1, 1s. and upwards was written in."¹ But he was remembering those details of the subscription papers more than forty years after he had edited the poems and had written his first biography. The facts are that no proposals were announced in any of the Edinburgh periodicals (very unusual for a subscribed publication), that no subscribers' list was printed in the book (also very uncommon), and that the Poems, in the end, were a failure and not a prepaid success (as would be the case with a subscribed volume). The Scots Magazine was following its usual practice of announcing the actual publication and indicating where the book was being sold. William Drummond "at Ossian's Head"² and Charles Elliot operated two separate bookselling and

1. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 102.

2. Courant, 4 March 1772.

publishing establishments. (Fergusson's friend Oliphant probably worked for Drummond.) Ruddiman had published Fergusson's book and it was being sold, on Fergusson's behalf, by Drummond and Elliot at the end of 1772. The date of publication on the title page, 1773, has no bearing on the matter: the obvious advantage in postdating a book was that it would not appear "stale" to a prospective buyer later on; it was commonly done, another instance being the 1782 edition of Fergusson's poems, which was issued in August 1781.³

The number of copies of the Poems which were sold amounted to "upwards of five hundred copies," according to Grosart.⁴ Further, says Grosart, Fergusson "pocketed a clear fifty pounds" from the sales.⁵ This is, of course, a mathematical impossibility, unless Ruddiman was content with sixpence per copy for his share. In view of the present-day rarity of the book and of eighteenth century publishing practices, the edition probably did not exceed 250 copies; 500 or more copies issued in Edinburgh would have placed the Poems in the "best-seller" class. And far from that stated profit, the phenomenally large sum of £50 (bread, butter and meat for from one to two

3. Courant, 15 August 1781.

4. Grosart, Works, p. lxxxv.

5. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 102.

years!), the book may not have repaid the cost of its publication.

When the sales had dragged along for a month, the disappointed author wrote to his brother (on 1 February 1773) suggesting that he, Hary, might dispose of some of the excess copies of the Poems. "When I arrive in England," replied Hary, after he had pronounced an Horatian exhortation that Robert examine his works carefully before consigning them to print, "I shall give you the necessary directions how to send your works, and make no doubt of selling them to advantage, when the ship is paid off." Since the ship did not return to England, we must assume that Hary's shipmates did not have the privilege of supporting Fergusson's Muse. By the autumn, the edition still on his hands, the poet rid himself of some of the unsold copies by making presentations; one of these was made to Sir Adam Fergusson, the chief of the family of that name, a fact of which Robert Fergusson was well aware. He sought to salve his hurt by finding a patron for his efforts in Scottish poetry. Despite all his attempts, the author was still unable to dispose of his works, and in 1779 the remaining sheets were bound to a Part II of his poems, a biography was

added, and they were again marketed.⁶

The presentation copies are the most interesting bibliographical aspect of the little book of poems. There are nine inscribed copies recorded, but it is reasonable to suspect that more exist or have existed.⁷ The first in importance, perhaps, is that given to James Boswell, "the Friend of Liberty and Patron of Science," i.e., Paoli and Johnson.⁸ It is only

6. Caledonian Mercury, 3 April 1779: "At same Shops [Drummond's and Elliot's] may be had, Price 2s. 6d. THE WHOLE POETICAL WORKS Of the late ingenious Mr ROBERT FERGUSSON. Containing many elegant Poems in the English language, and a variety of pieces of uncommon fancy and humour in the Scots dialect. To which is prefixed, A Preface, containing a short sketch of his Life and Character. Such as are possessed of the first part of the Poems, may be supplied with the second singly, at ls. 6d." Note that the price of the double volume was the same as the price of the 1773 edition.

Fairley was of the opinion that Part II was never sold singly, since he had found no example of it. Separate copies of this are to be found, however, at King's College Library, Aberdeen, and at Edinburgh University Library. The Alexander Gardyne MS. Catalogue at the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, lists another, and the Murray presentation copy is bound to what was a separate Part II. The Herd presentation copy at St. Andrews University Library may not be the actual volume given to Herd and bound to a separate Part II, but a 1779 issue of the two parts with the presentation page pasted in.

7. See Law, Alexander, "Inscribed Copies of the First Edition of the Poems of Robert Fergusson," Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions, v. III, pt. 2 (Edinburgh 1954).

8. For presentation inscriptions, see Appendix K.

(Robert Fergusson, p. 103). Fida lived at 4 James Square from 1816 to 1843.

natural that Fergusson should have admired young Boswell, who was so early making such a figure in the world, especially as the friend of Paoli.⁹ He undoubtedly had come in contact with Boswell either through the latter's interest in the theatre or through the dealings which Boswell had with the Commissary Office.¹ Alexander Murray, later Lord Henderland, received a copy which was dated (as was Boswell's) 14 January 1773. He was a Commissary from 1765 to 1775.² William Nairne, the son of Sir William Nairne of Dunsinnan, and a Commissary Clerk,³ was given a copy, as was Alexander Kidd, a fellow copyist (?) who died as late as 1844.⁴ Presentations were made to two

9. Grosart, Robert Fergusson (p. 102) assigns Boswell and Fergusson's having been schoolfellows as a reason for the presentation. But the "Jas. Boswell" on the High School Library lists was a cousin of the Boswell. The biographer went to the school of "James Mundell, teacher of Humanity in the West Bow" (Courant, 19 June 1762).
1. In March 1773 Boswell acted as counsel along with John Ferguson of the Commissary Office in a trial (Advertiser, 12-16 March 1773). We too often forget Boswell's importance as a lawyer; a glance at contemporary newspapers throws much light on the figure he cut as a lawyer as well as a national hero.
2. See DNB.
3. See Grant, Francis J., ed., Faculty of Advocates in Scotland 1532-1943 (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh 1944).
4. The Kidd copy has been lost, but Grosart recorded it (Robert Fergusson, p. 102). Kidd lived at 4 James Square from 1816 to 1843.

clergymen, the Reverend William Welsh of Haddington and the Reverend Peter Miller of Dunbar. Fergusson had some Haddington connections, and we know that Collector Lorimer of Dunbar was a friend. Further recipients were: David Herd; Sir Adam Fergusson, who was a well-known lawyer and a lover of poetry; and Gavin Wilson, a shoemaker, among whose creative accomplishments were a various assortment of artificial leather limbs and A Collection of Masonic Songs, and entertaining anecdotes (Edinburgh 1788). Wilson was also a member of the Cape Club, having undergone initiation with Fergusson. The inscription in his copy of the Poems is a poetic eulogy of his virtues as a souter and a friend.⁵ Some of the extant presentation copies seem to have been bound uniformly in calf, with a rose or thistle device on the spine and a crescent-shaped ornament on the edges of the boards, the word "POEM" appearing on the back.⁶

* * *

As 1772 closed, Fergusson would not yet have felt the

5. It is possible that Fergusson and Wilson were Freemasons together at St. David's Lodge in Edinburgh. One of Wilson's songs mentions a "brother Ferguson," but there is no confirmation of the poet's Masonhood. Mr. John Ross, Secretary of St. David's, informs me that James Rae, Ruddiman, and Thomas Lancashire were also members of the Lodge.
6. Grosart indicated that the Earl of Glencairn's copy of the Poems was an inscribed one, but W. Craibe Angus, who owned it, denied that it was (see Law, "Inscribed Copies..."). In Robert Fergusson (p. 102), Grosart claimed to have owned a large paper copy of the Poems of the size of his 1786 Burns. If this were true, why were not the presentation copies on large paper, why have no large paper copies turned up, and why were none advertised? Perhaps a slightly trimmed copy would nearly match a much trimmed 1786 Burns.

cutting disappointment of the failure of his Poems. Ahead of him was his most creative year. He was assuming that a large part of his work would be done in English. He was well aware of his achievement and of his potential achievement in Scots, but he knew the eternal limitations of a Scotsman who stays at home linguistically as well as physically. The turning point had come, true, but Robert Fergusson was turning very slowly. Too slowly, almost too late.

This time Fergusson did not take his first steps into the new year with stumbling or hesitancy. He had mastered "standard habbie"; it was well enough within his grasp so that he was able to put his hand to subtle irony in Callar Water. Just as his Daff Dugs had widened the eyes of the readers of the poetry pages, so this poem, too, dealt them a sudden jolt, for Fergusson used ancient religious figures with good-natured, but almost innocent, familiarity:

When father Ailie first set hands in
The bonny yard of antique Eden,
His mairy had nae liquor laid in,
To fire his mair;
Nor did he thole his wife's upbraiding
For being fop!

His hairns a' before the flood
Had langer tack o' flesh and blood,
And on mair pithy shanks they stood
Than Noah's line,
Wha still has been a faultless brood
Wi' drinking wine.

CHAPTER TEN

As 1772 had begun with a Scots poem, so did 1773. The first weeks of the year probably were occupied with the sale of his book, or merely with the complacent feeling which such a publication imparts, so that Fergusson did not have his New Year's offering ready until 21 January, when Caller Water was printed in The Weekly Magazine.

This time Fergusson did not take his first steps into the new year with stumbling or uncertainty. He had mastered "standard habbie"; it was well enough within his grasp so that he was able to put his hand to subtle irony in Caller Water. Just as his Daft Days had widened the eyes of the readers of the poetry pages, so this poem, too, dealt them a sudden jolt, for Fergusson used august religious figures with good-natured, but almost indecent, familiarity:

Whan father Adie first pat spade in
 The bonny yeard of antient Eden,
 His amry had nae liquor laid in,
 To fire his mou',
 Nor did he thole his wife's upbraidin'
 For being fou'

...

His bairns a' before the flood
 Had langer tack o' flesh and blood,
 And on mair pithy shanks they stood
 Than Noah's line,
 Wha still hae been a feckless brood
 Wi' drinking wine.

The familiar treatment is actually a folk element, the tendency of the common people to conceive historical or religious figures at their own level. The shock effect of such a poetic device is not, of course, too profound, but it is an eye-catching oddity. The poet attacks the Bacchanalians:

The fuddlin' Bardies now-a-days
 Rin maukin-mad in Bacchus' praise,
 And limp and stoiter thro' their lays
Anacreontic,
 While each his sea of wine displays
 As big's the Pontic.

His own Muse "will no gang far frae hame." He will praise the virtues of "aqua font":

This is the name that doctors use
 Their patients noddles to confuse;
 Wi' simples clad in terms abstruse,
 They labour still,
 In kittle words to gar you roose
 Their want o' skill.

He selects two qualities of caller water to celebrate, medicinal and beautifying:

Tho' joints are stiff as ony rung,
 Your pith wi' pain be fairly dung,
 Be you in Caller Water flung
 Out o'er the lugs,
 'Twill mak you souple, swack and young,
 Withouten drugs.

1. MacL... Wer't na for it the bonny lasses
 (MS.) Would glowr nae mair in keeking glasses,
 2. John... And soon time dint o' a' the graces
 That aft-conveen
 In gleefu' looks and bonny faces,
 To catch our ein.

more, "What makes Auld Reikie's dames sae fair, a they were
 It canna be the hailesom air,
 overheard But caller burn beyond compare,
 The best of ony,
 That gars them a' sic graces skair, a joke,
 For aces the a And blink sae bonny.
 Better than lawyers do, forsooth.

The reader of the poem is permitted a double interpretation.

Fergusson, the drinking man--in a hard-drinking city and in a
 hard-drinking age--extols the beneficial character of fresh
 water with a faint glint in his eye. The irony is delicate,
 almost unseen. At the same time, the surface meaning attracts
 Of Gallie chairmen heavy treadin...
 and amuses us.

Causey returns that, though he must daily groan under the
 traffic of coaches, wagons, and Highland chair bearers, he
 as it repeats Fergusson's views on intemperance: "What evils
 never complains. But, wretches Plainstones, you are built
 have not frenzy'd mortals done/By wine, that ignis fatuus of
 for the isak and I as not.
 the mind!"

...I, a weak and feckless creature,
Mutual Complaint of Plainstones and Causey, in their
Mother-Tongue (4 March) is a clever class satire. A dialogue
 I scarce can bear a saiver thump
 between the flagstoned footpath and the unpaved roadway, it
 has been called a "flyting eclogue."¹ Fergusson was the first
 to use the form, but it was based, of course, on the classical
 and on the Scots eclogue.² The two companions, Plainstones
 and Causey, lying side by side for three hundred years and

shop buildings which stood in the middle of the High Street
 1. MacLaine, Allan Hugh, Robert Fergusson: A Critical Study
 (MS.), p. 247.
 2. John Gay had turned the classical eclogue to humorous use
 in The Shepherd's Week.

more, "were never kend to crack but anes," and then they were overheard by a cadie:

Ye taunting lowns trow this nae joke,
For anes the ass of Balaam spoke,
Better than lawyers do, forsooth,
For it spake naething but the truth...

Plainstones, in the tones of a pouting aristocrat, opens the conversation with the complaint that nowadays he must bear the feet of all classes of people.

Speak, was I made to dree the laidin
Of Gallic chairman heavy treadin...

Causey returns that, though he must daily groan under the traffic of coaches, wagons, and Highland chair bearers, he never complains. But, protests Plainstones, you are built for the task and I am not.

"...I, a weak and feckless creature,
Am moulded by a safter nature.
Wi' mason's chissel dighted neat,
To gar me look baith clean and feat,
I scarce can bear a sairer thump
Than comes frae sole of shoe or pump.

The speech of Plainstones disturbs Causey and he counters:

Though I have sprung from Arthur's Seat (the source of his building materials), I am sore put. It would hurt the hardest stone to have to hold up the Luckenbooths, the warehouses and shop buildings which stood in the middle of the High Street along with the Guard House; the magistrates have removed the

Mercat Cross, but have done nothing about the other obstructions.

Tho' magistrates the Cross discard,
It makes na whan they leave the Guard,
A lumbbersome and stinkin bigging,
That rides the sairest on my rigging.

(The poet, as everyone else, must have had an aversion to the unsightly buildings.) Further, Causey tells Plainstones, your folk, the lawyers, are in the habit of standing on me, and they refuse to gather at the Plainstane square behind St. Giles which is proper for them. Causey takes defiant pride in his simplicity:

Then tak your beaux and macaronies
Gie me trades-fock and country Johnies... Scottish

It is finally agreed that the two might seek a warrant to compel all persons to walk in their proper places. But first, suggests Causey, "it will be good/To bring it to the Robinhood..." (the debating society of which Fergusson was a member). The light of day terminates the conversation. The satire of the piece is not serious. Plainstones and Causey is joyful; there is not so much fun in some of Fergusson's later poems.

The next poem was stronger stuff. The Rising of the Session (18 March), celebrating the adjournment of the Court of Session, was personal, since Fergusson probably depended on saved-up fees, bairned miltar, but the copyists will know hardship

the Court for occasional employment.

To a' men living be it kend,
The Session now is at an end:
Writers, your finger-nebbs unbend,
 And quatt the pen,
Till Time wi' lyart pow shall send
 Blythe June again.

(At that time, the Court reassembled in June.)

Tir'd o' the law, and a' its phrases,
The wylie writers, rich as Croesus,
Hurl frae the town in hackney chaises,
 For country cheer:
The powny that in spring-time grazes,
 Thrives a' the year.

The "writers" of the first stanza are the copyists; those of the second stanza are solicitors, according to the Scottish designation. They are further contrasted:

Ye lawyers, bid fareweel to lies,
Fareweel to din, fareweel to fees,
The canny hours o' rest may please
 Instead o' siller:
Hain'd multer hads the mill at ease,
 And finds the miller.

...

Now mony a fallow's dung adrift
To a' the blasts beneath the lift,
And tho' their stamack's aft in tift
 In vacance time,
Yet seenil do they ken the rift
 O' stappit weym.

The lawyers will be able to rest in the security of their saved-up fees, hained multer, but the copyists will know hardship

during the adjournment. The poem then becomes less personal. to Fergusson mentions the local businesses which will suffer because the lawyers, who were wont to do business in taverns and coffee houses, have left the town. He brings in the names of "Robin Gibb," a tavern keeper, and "Indian Peter" Williamson, the fabulous ex-Indian captive, who ran a coffee house; he relies everywhere on these familiar references for some of his popularity, but he is not merely localizing his subject; he is getting it down to brass tacks. The final stanzas are of this descriptive nature, thus softening the almost antagonistic opening of the poem. Such satire was not evident in his earlier work: the Elegy on the Death of Mr. David Gregory was a copy; Braid Claith was lighter and it retained its humor. It was a failure, as Fergusson said.

The few English poems which Fergusson composed during 1773 differed considerably from his earlier work in English. The Sow of Feeling (8 April) commenced a train of works which were very different from the pastoral productions. Some development was taking place in the man and in the poet. The Sow is the lament of a sentimental pig who has lost her husband and her children to the butcher. To anyone who has suffered through Henry MacKenzie's Man of Feeling, it is genuinely Pennesque.

funny. It was, however, a bold stroke for Fergusson to make, to attack the prevailing attitude toward sentimental literature--and to attack MacKenzie! As if he desired to overemphasize his point, he introduced the poem with a quotation from the epilogue of The Prince of Tunis, a classical-sentimental tragedy by MacKenzie. It is no wonder that MacKenzie never forgave Fergusson.

The Epilogue, Spoken by Mr. Wilson, at the Theatre-Royal, in the character of an Edinburgh buck (22 April) has been mentioned previously. Considered in context, i.e., compared with theatrical prologues and epilogues of the eighteenth century, it is superior. Ode to the Bee (29 April), in rhymed couplets, is a conventional nature description in Scots with observations from which a moral is drawn ("Instructive bee! attend me still..."). It was a failure, an English poem with Scots words.³

The Ode had been dated "Broomhouse, East Lothian, April 26. 1773," and we can assume it was that country sojourn which directly inspired The Farmer's Ingle (13 May). The verse form was new to Fergusson, being in the Spenserian stanza of Shenstone's Schoolmistress and Thomson's Castle of Indolence.

3. For a source, see Alexander Pennecuik's Inscription for my Bee-house. Fergusson (lines 23 ff.) actually paraphrases Pennecuik.

While it is a major work, with an overall unity and organization unusual to Fergusson, it nevertheless clings to the pastoral influence of the early English poems. The first stanza begins:

The grandfather
by the fire
It is a simple picture
Whan gloming grey out o'er the welkin keeks,
Whan Batie ca's his owsen to the byre,
Whan Thrasher John, sair dung, his barn-door steeks,
And lusty lasses at the dighting tire...

but the same stanza ends with:

stanza:
Begin, my Muse, and chant in hamely strain.

It is not the individual lines, however, which remind us of the pastorals; it is the whole idea of the work: the idealistic picture of the happy cottar. It is not difficult for us to shed most of our prejudices in its convincing details. The gudeman enters his cot, and the gudewife knows well that he will enjoy his "nappy liquor" after his toil.

unique in artificial Wi' butter'd bannocks now the girdle reeks,
I' the far nook the bowie briskly reams;
The readied kail stand by the chimley cheeks...

There is a strong sensual appeal. This auspicious opening, however, is soon marred by a patriotic stanza ("On sicken food has mony a doughty deed/By Caledonia's ancestors been done..."). The "couthy cracks" and the gossip come when the supper is finished. The grandmother relates tales of warlocks

securities; the taxes...

and ghosts to the children:

Wi' eild our idle fancies a' return,
And dim our dolefu' days wi' bairnly fear;
The mind's ay cradled whan the grave is near.

The grandfather, the patriarch wise in counsel, sits quietly
by the fire. Finally, the household retires for the night.

It is a simple picture, which has a force and meaning in itself;

Fergusson unnecessarily lengthened it with another patriotic
stanza:

Peace to the husbandman and a' his tribe,
Whase care fells a' our wants frae year to year;
Lang may his sock and couter turn the gleyb,
And bauks o' corn bend down wi' laded ear.
May Scotia's simmers ay look gay and green,
Her yellow har'sts frae scowry blasts decreed;
May a' her tenants sit fu' snug and bien,
Frae the hard grip of ails and poortith freed,
And a lang lasting train o' peaceful hours succeed.

Much has been made of The Farmer's Ingle. It is certainly
unique in English literature, but one cannot help feeling an
artificiality which is seldom felt in the Edinburgh poems.

The Ghaists: A Kirk-Yard Eclogue (27 May), a topical
piece, reminds us of Plainstones and Causey, though it is not
a flyting. The matter of the poem concerns the Mortmain Bill,
by which Parliament desired to take up the endowments of
charitable institutions and to convert them to three per cent
securities; the three per cent income was then to be used to

4. But Fergusson put George Heriot's ghost to some difficulty,
since Heriot had been buried in London in St. Martin's-in-
the-Fields, and not in his father's tomb at Greyfriars.

support the institutions. Two Edinburgh hospitals, or charity schools, would have been affected: that founded by George Heriot and that founded by George Watson. Controversy was generated by the proposal, and Fergusson demonstrated his disapproval by raising the ghosts of the two philanthropists in Greyfriars Churchyard⁴ for a discussion of the Bill:

The Twa sheeted ghaists, sae grizly and sae wan,
'Mang lanely tombs their douff discourse began.
Befitting the linguistic level of the poem, the ghosts are exactly what folklorish spectres should be. Throughout the dialogue which follows, it is especially apparent that the poet is well-versed in his city's history and traditions. He has definite feelings about this Bill which will affect two historic foundations of his city. His words have a

sting:

Dead R., I e'en maun dip my pen,
But how to write I dinna ken;
For learning, I gat fin' a grain
Black be the day that e'er to England's ground
Scotland was eikit by the Union's bond;
For mony a menzie of destructive ill
The country now maun brook frae mortmain bills...

He states that he is very sure that the poet once dwelt "abien"
...

5. It should be noted that the poet was a friend of the poet. This bliphant was a perfumer, druggist, and seller of soap... and jest books. His advertisements appear frequently in the Courant and other newspapers.

4. But Fergusson put George Heriot's ghost to some difficulty, since Heriot had been buried in London in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and not in his father's tomb at Greyfriars.

the mair," Whan they are doom'd to keep a lasting Lent,
Starving for England's weel at three per cent.

do here/At Amund back." He invites the poet to visit him

...

at his home, "Whistleba" (i.e., Parnassus). It is difficult

Auld Reikie than may bless the gowden times,
Whan honesty and poortith baith are crimes;

She little kend, when you and I endow'd

Our hospitals for back-gaun burghers gude,

That e'er our siller or our lands should bring

A gude bien living to a back-gaun k--g...

who The Bugs (10 June), with its epic introduction, is the

same blank verse foolery of The Saturday's Expedition, too

grandiose and too unpoetical to be very amusing.⁵

The last and most important of Fergusson's poetical

correspondences was with "Andrew Gray." The reputation of

Scotland's new vernacular poet had spread far.⁶ In The Perth

Magazine (11 June 1773) Gray addressed "R. Fergusson":

is written Deed R., I e'en man dip my pen,

But how to write I dinna ken;

have conv For learning, I got fint a grain,

To tell me how

same way To write to ony gentleman

Sic like as you.

various aspects of Gray's letter, the poet discusses poetry

He states that he is very sure that the poet once dwelt "abien
with this kindred soul, the riddle maker:

5. It should be noted that the Oliphant mentioned in this poem is not the same one who appears elsewhere and who was a friend of the poet. This Oliphant was a perfumer, druggist, and seller of song and jest books. His advertisements appear frequently in the Courant and other newspapers.
6. Already Caller Water (26 February 1773) and The Farmer's Ingle (21 May 1773) had been reprinted in The Perth Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure.

Her read while is rough an' round,
 the mier," for Fergusson speaks in the same manner as "we
 do here/At Amond back." He invites the poet to visit him
 at his home, "Whistleha'" (i.e., Parnassus). It is difficult
 to trace the identity of Andrew Gray. Grosart (Works, p. 71)
 indicated Dr. Toshack of Perth, but Toshack had died some
 months earlier. Dr. Andrew Gray, the minister of Abernethy,
 who had been at St. Andrews before 1770, is a better candidate.⁷
 From the verse letter which Gray wrote, we know that he was
 a riddle maker, and he may have had some personal knowledge
 of the poet.⁸ At any rate, an examination of the parish
 registers of Perthshire shows us that Gray was not an uncommon
 name in the area. To Andrew Gray, Fergusson's reply to the
 epistle, also appeared in The Perth Magazine (2 July). It
 is written in the Scots of Perthshire, and certainly should
 have convinced Gray that Fergusson could "crack/The very
 sam way we do here/At Amond back." After answering the
 various aspects of Gray's letter, the poet discusses poetry
 with this kindred soul, the riddle maker:

7. McDiarmid, p. 43. Also see Grosart, Robert Fergusson,
 p. 100.

8. "Ye've English plain enough nae doubt,
 And Latin too..."

Portrait: "The gaudy, glittering insect of a day."

Fergusson: "Kind nature lend but for a day
 Her wings to make ye sprush and gay..."

Also see William Hamilton of Bangour's The Biss and the
 Butterfly and Horace's Epistle XVIII.

Her road awhile is rough an' round,
 An' few poetic gowans found;
 The stey braes o' the muses ground
 We scarce can crawl up;
 But on the tap we're light as wind
 To scour an' gallop.

Such shop talk should convince the casual reader of Fergusson that the poet had served a conscientious apprenticeship--that his approach to his Scots poetry was serious. The last letter of the correspondence was Gray's reply (17 September).

A comparison of On Seeing a Butterfly in the Street (24 June) with the Ode to the Bee will illustrate the point that Fergusson is more competent in the city than in the country. A poem with a moral, it is nevertheless bearable partly because the moral is not of the usual variety we have hitherto seen. The conception is not of Fergusson's making: a poem which had appeared in the Advertiser of 2-6 April 1773 probably was the original of it.⁹ The butterfly is compared

9. Portrait of a Modern Fine Gentleman. Here the gentleman is compared with a butterfly. There are similarities of expression:

Portrait: "And winnows with soft wing his easy way,
 Till from the north a sudden blast arise..."

Fergusson: "Whan simmer's blinks are warm an' fair,
 An' loo to snuff the healthy balm
 Whan ev'nin' spreads her wing sae calm;
 But whan she girns an' glowrs sae dour
 Frae Borean houff in angry show'r..."

Portrait: "The gaudy, glittering insect of a day."

Fergusson: "Kind nature lent but for a day
 Her wings to make ye sprush and gay..."

Also see William Hamilton of Bangour's The Miss and the Butterfly and Horace's Epistle XVIII.

with the rake, the country lairdling who has come to the city:

Daft gowk, in macaroni dress,
Are ye come here to shew your face,
Bowden wi' pride o' simmer gloss,
To cast a dash at Reikie's cross;
And glowr at mony twa-legg'd creature,
Flees braw by art, tho' worms by nature?

...

Poor butterfly! thy case I mourn,
To gree kail-yard and fruits return:
How cou'd you troke the Mavis' note
For "penny pies all-piping hot?"
Can lintie's music be compar'd
Wi' gruntles frae the City-guard?

In July month, as bower work,

...

Whan Nature's smiling green
Was spread o'er like rags of corn,

To sic mishanter rins the laird
Wha quats his ha'-house an' kail yard,
Grows politician, scours to court,
Whare he's the laughing-stock and sport
Of Ministers, wha jeer an' jibe,
And heeze his hopes wi' thought o' bribe...

Quod he, "I fairly ... sair,

"That ye sud mused yet,

Their fleetching words o'er late he sees,
He trudges hame, repines and dies.

The gentle beauty of the picture itself, of the poet speaking
to the misplaced butterfly, is enough to sustain the moral.

Hame Content--A Satire (8 July), in rhymed couplets and in
Scots, is an Horatian hodgepodge of morals: chiefly, that
we should stay at home rather than run off to foreign places.

Steadily, now, Fergusson is reaching his highest attainments. His Scots poetry is improving in form, in wording, in organization. The experimental poems are far behind him, and inevitably his best work is just ahead. Leith Races (22 July) is certainly his finest creation. Even more than for Hallow-fair, he draws upon the past of Scottish poetry and culture, upon the pure tradition of medieval letters; he employs the Christis Kirk stanza. He begins with an allegory which would challenge the best of the makars.

In July month, ae bonny morn,
 "A bargain. Whan Nature's rokelay green together they go off to
 Was spread o'er ilka rigg o' corn,
 observe the To charm our roving een; we now leave our medieval
 Glouring about I saw a quean,
 allegory for The fairest 'neath the lift; the morning the
 Her Een ware o' the siller sheen,
 servant maid Her Skin like snawy drift, a purpose of catching
 Sae white that day.
 a man, "(And troth he's fain to get her)". At the race
 Quod she, "I ferly unco sair,
 -course, the "That ye sud musand gae,
 "Ye wha hae sung o' Hallow-fair,
 "Her winter's pranks and play:
 "Whan on Leith-Sands the racers rare,
 "Wi' Jocky louns are met, their height, their griet,
 "Their orro pennies there to ware,
 "And drown themsel's in debt
 "Fu' deep that day."

The City Guard is shaven for the occasion, and the Captain warns
 This being, who was appealing to the poet to chronicle the annual
 them to be careful:

race on the Leith Sands, intrigues him:

An' wha are ye, my winsome dear,
That takes the gate sae early?
Whare do ye win, gin ane may spier,
For I right meikle ferly...

The' they should dearly pay the kane,
An' get their wool sautit
and sair their days.

"I dwell amang the caller springs

"That weet the Land o' Cakes,

"And after tune my canty strings

"At bridals and late-wakes:

"They ca' me Mirth; I ne'er was kend

"To grumble or look sour,

"But blyth wad be a lift to lend,

"Gif ye wad sey my pow'r

"An' pith this day."

"A bargain be't," cries the poet, and together they go off to

observe the activity of the races. We now leave our medieval

allegory for the contemporary scene. In the morning the

servant maid dresses with the conscious purpose of catching

a man, "(And troth he's fain to get her)". At the race

course, the touts are hawking:

"Here is the true an' faithfu' list

"O' Noblemen and Horses;

"Their eild, their weight, their height, their grist,

"That rin for Plates or Purses

"Fu' fleet this day."

The City Guard is shaven for the occasion, and the Captain warns

them to be careful:

While Her Nanesel maun be carefu' now, all their worst ale,
 Nor maun she pe misleard,
 the "Bucha Sin baxter lads hae seal'd a vow and speech": "Gused
 To skelp and clout the guard:
 spellings. I'm sure Auld Reikie kens o' nane
 That wou'd be sorry at it,
 Tho' they should dearly pay the kane,
 An' get their tails weel sautit
 And sair thir days.

The baxters' vow was not a fiction. During the King's Birthday celebrations on 4 June, a fracas had occurred.

It is...to be regretted, that, on such days of festivity, the lower class of people seldom indulge their mirth without mischief. On this occasion they became, towards the evening, perfectly licentious, and, after their ammunition of squibs and crackers was exhausted, they employed dead cats, mud, &c, which they discharged very plentifully on the city guard; and, when threatened to be chastised or apprehended, they betook themselves to the more dangerous weapons of stones, brickbats, &c. In this encounter several of the guard were wounded, and they in return dealt their blows pretty liberally, by which amid the confusion, some innocent persons suffered along with the guilty.¹

One of the "innocent persons" injured had been Robert Lothian, a journeyman baker, who had suffered a fractured skull from the Lochaber axe of Town Guardsman William Henry.² In consequence of Lothian's death on 21 June,³ the other baxter lads had settled on revenge.

1. Weekly Magazine, 10 June 1773.

2. 17 June 1773.

3. Courant, 23 June 1773.

4. See Dunbar's The Taxicall and the Poet, 1773. There were several editions of this available to Fergusson. Ramsay included it in v. 2 of The Poet.

While the browster wives prepare to sell their worst ale,
the "Buchan bodies" cry out in their "Nor'land speech": "Gueed
speldings, fa will buy?"

Weel staw'd wi' them, he'll never spear
The price of being fu'
Wi' drink that day.

The gamblers are throwing their dice, and now the carriages
come. A medieval heraldic element enters the poem:⁴

The LYON here, wi' open paw,
May cleek in mony hunder,
Wha geck at Scotland and her law,
His wyly talons under;
For ken, tho' Jamie's laws are auld,
(Thanks to the wise recorder),
His Lyon yet roars loud and bawld,
To had the Whigs in order
Sae prime this day.

The races come, and with them fights. Finally, the rest of
the day is given to drinking. Leith Races reminds us of
Hallow-fair, but altogether it reaches higher. Its links
with the older Scots tradition are stronger, though that in
itself is not its virtue. Its superiority rests ultimately
in intangible qualities, its more polished expression and its
imaginative devices. If any fault is visible, it is that the
vehicle is too impressive for the amount of material it
carries; the cart is too large and ornate for the load.

4. See Dunbar's The Thrissil and the Rois, lines 91-112.
There were several editions of this available to
Fergusson. Ramsay included it in v. 2 of The Evergreen.

No equivalent attainment was to be found in the English verse. Tea, A Poem (5 August) urges, for the sake of health and of patriotism, that Britons should reject tea for the "plants of Britain," "green sage and wild thyme."⁵ Ode to the Gowdspink (12 August), a moral piece in Scots, eulogizes liberty and mentions Mary, whom we have already discussed. It is more in the order of Ode to the Bee than On Seeing a Butterfly, though it is better than the former poem. An Expedition to Fife and the Island of May, on board the Blessed Endeavour of Dunbar, Captain Roxburgh Commander (26 August) is a semi-philosophic essay constructed around a mid-August pleasure excursion on a whaling ship.⁶ One wonders why such a poem as this was not written in Scots, for it is a situation which the poet would well be able to set down in Scots. It probably is an example of the difficulty Fergusson had in tearing loose from English a subject and treatment which was essentially in the English tradition. The Saturday's Expedition

5. In The Weekly Magazine (5 August 1773) at the Edinburgh Public Library, a contemporary hand comments: "Perhaps so Rabie but I don't think they would be very pleasant."
6. Courant, 14 August 1773: "The Blessed Endeavour of Dunbar arrived at that port on Tuesday last [10 August] from the Greenland seas, with one large fish [whale]." McDiarmid (p. 61) suggests that Lorimer may have accompanied Fergusson.

Therefore Fergusson would not have fed him as graciously with

is a similar case. When he was able to Scoticize such a subject, as in Auld Reikie, not only the language, but the theme, too, is elevated. Several lines of the poem, two of which follow,

To Fife we steer, of all beneath the sun
The most unhallow'd 'midst the Scotian plains!,

caused an overzealous Fife gentleman to challenge the poet to a duel.

Three poems concerned Samuel Johnson. In 1773 the newspapers were filled with news of the Great Trek of the lexicographer and his young Scottish companion. For a time, at least, the provincial people were flattered at the visit. While Fergusson could naturally admire Boswell, he was unable to hold the same feelings for the Scotophobe Doctor. The reports of the dinner given in Johnson's honor at his alma mater moved him to the satire, To The Principal and Professors of the University of St. Andrews, on their Superb Treat to Dr. Samuel Johnson (2 September). The Principal and Professors are reminded of Johnson's ill treatment of the Scots in his definition of 'oats' in the Dictionary:

Mind ye what Sam, the lying loun!
Has in his Dictionar laid down?
That Aits in England are a feast
To cow an' horse, an' sican beast,
While in Scots ground this growth was common
To gust the gab o' Man and Woman.

Therefore Fergusson would not have fed him so graciously with

foreign delicacies; he would have given him "gudely hameil

gear":ions from that work, appeared in The Edinburgh Advertiser

(25-29 Sept) Imprimus, then, a haggis fat,

Weel tottl'd in a seything pat,

on 14 Janu Wi' spice and ingans weel ca'd thro'

Had help'd to gust the stirrah's mow,

equally ol And plac'd itsel in truncher clean

Before the gilpy's glowrin een.

Edition of Secundo, then a gude sheep's head

Whase hide was singit, never flead...

fanciful Latinisms and references to anti-

And so on.

It is a witty, as well as an original composition. The final

Then let his wisdom girn an' snarl

bit of John O'er a weel-tostit girdle farl,

An' learn, that maugre o' his wame,

Dr Samuel Ill bairns are ay best heard at hame. Sky (4 November).

The humor of this wonderful piece of satire is perhaps best

conveyed to us when we try to imagine what Johnson's remark

might have been were he confronted with that uncanny creation,

the haggis, or the cold, unnerving stare of a sheep's head.

The final lines of the poem were used to answer the challenge

which had been received for the remarks in The Expedition to

Fife. a b a b a c a c 5; but it is not so impressive a poem

as Leith Rac What's this I hear some cynic say? the latter retained

Robin, ye loun! its nae fair play;

Is there nae ither subject rife

7. Grosart To clap your thumb upon but Fife? and it to Fergusson.

8. Advertiser, 23 October-2 November 1773: "Extract of a

letter from Inverary. ... Dr Johnson and Dr Boswell

have at last appeared. It seems they sailed from the Isle

of Sky on the 12 instant, and for Fife; but were

driven to the coast that day,

to the ... and for a

fortnight.

Come on ye blades! but ere ye tulzie,

Or hack our flesh wi' sword or gulzie,

Ne'er shaw your teeth, nor look like stink,

Nor o'er an empty bicker blink:

What weets the wizen an' the wyme,

Will mend your prose and heal my rhyme.

A clever poem on Johnson's Dictionary, worded with intricate selections from that work, appeared in The Edinburgh Advertiser (25-29 September 1767) and was reprinted in The Weekly Magazine on 14 January 1773.⁷ This was the wellspring for Fergusson's equally clever exercise, To Samuel Johnson: Food for a New Edition of his Dictionary (21 October). It is made up of fanciful Latinisms and inevitably makes reference to oats.

It is a witty, as well as an exacting, composition. The final bit of Johnsoniana was Epigram, on James Boswell, Esq; and Dr Samuel Johnson being confined to the Isle of Sky (4 November). Fergusson had misread the reports;⁸ it was the Isle of Coll on which the travellers were stranded, though they had had some minor difficulty in leaving Skye.

The Election (16 September), the third and last work in the Christis Kirk stanza, is the only piece in which the "Deacon Cocks" gives another hint of allegory and medievalism. The stanza appears nearly in its original form (Fergusson modifies it: a b a b a c a c d), but it is not so impressive a poem as Leith Races. (Only the opening stanzas of the latter retained in poetry, the rollicking, the earthy, and the crude, genuine

7. Grosart (Works, p. 249) erroneously assigns it to Fergusson.

8. Advertiser, 29 October-2 November 1773: "Extract of a letter from Inverary, Oct. 26. 'Dr Johnson and Mr Boswell have at last appeared. It seems they sailed from the isle of Sky on the 3d instant, bound for Icolmkill; but were driven, by the remarkable storm which came on that day, to the isle of Coll, where they were wind bound for a fortnight.'"

the pure form.) A poem such as this should be appreciated, in part, for the limitations of its form. Every two years the respective trade guilds of Edinburgh elected deacons to sit on the Town Council;⁹ the tradesmen, who formed the electorate, suddenly became men of importance, but the election was chiefly an excuse for a day of celebration. The motto of the poem runs thus:

Nunc est bibendum, et bendere Bickerum magnum;
Cavete Town-guardum, D[ouga]l G[e]dd[u]m atque C[am]pb[ellu]m.

(Ged and Campbell were officers of the Guard.)

Rejoice, ye Burghers, ane an' a',
 Lang look't for's come at last;
 Sair war your backs held to the wa'
 Wi' poortith an' wi' fast:
 Now ye may clap your wings an' craw,
 And gayly busk ilk' feather,
 For Deacon Cocks hae pass'd a law
 To rax an' weet your leather
 Wi' drink thir days.

"Deacon Cocks" gives another hint of allegory and medievalism.

The narrative which follows seems also to have been pulled from a more robust age of poetry than the eighteenth century. In poetry, the rollicking, the earthy, and the crude, genuine folk elements, are more apparent in the Scottish nature than in the English. The story of John's preparations for the

9. See Arnot, pp. 513-19.

election day are not rollicking and earthy for the sake of crude and uncut humor alone; Fergusson is an artist who is expressing his profound interest in John and his associates. It is sufficient to compare this work with one of Ramsay's Edinburgh descriptions to discover the difference between broad Scots humor and humorous artistic expression. Fergusson focuses his attention on human foibles, on odd human truths, not merely on human mistakes.

Haste, Epps, quo' John, an' bring my gez!
 Tak tent ye dinna't spulzie:
 Last night the barber ga't a friz,
 An' straikit it wi' ulzie.
 Hae done your paritch lassie Liz,
 Gi'e me my sark and gravat;
 I'se be as braw's the Deacon is
 Whan he taks Affidavit
 O' Faith the day.

The manner of presenting John's excitement is subtle, yet direct and dramatic; it has a conscious style.

Whar's Johnny gaun, cries neebor Bess,
 That he's sae gayly bodin
 Wi' new kam'd wig, weel syndet face,
 Silk hose, for hamely hodin?
 "Our Johnny's nae sma' drink, you'll guess,
 "He's trig as ony muir-cock,
 "An' forth to mak a Deacon, lass;
 "He downa speak to poor fock
 "Like us the day."

The description of the celebrations is more boisterous. Yet our attention is always on the people, even when Jock, after

his day of intemperance, falls into an uncomfortable situation
and has the contents of a chamber pot flung at him:

Weel loes me o' you, souter Jock,
For tricks ye buit be trying,
Whan greapin for his ain bed-stock,
He fa's whare Will's wife's lying.
Will coming hame wi' ither fock,
He saw Jock there before him;
Wi' Master Laiglen, like a brock
He did wi' stink maist smore him
Fu' strang that night.

Then wi' a souple leathern whang
He gart them fidge an' girn ay,
"Faith, Chiel, ye's no for naething gang
"Gin ye man reel my pirny."
Syne wi' a muckle alshin lang
He brodit Maggie's hurdies;
An' 'cause he thought her i' the wrang,
There pass'd nae bonny wordies
'Mang them that night.

Now, had some laird his lady fand,
In sic unseemly courses,
It might hae loos'd the haly band,
Wi' law-suits an' Divorces:
But the niest day they a' shook hands,
And ilka crack did sowder,
While Megg for drink her apron pawns,
For a' the gude-man cow'd her
Whan fu' last night.

The would-be deacons are active:

Glowr round the cawsey, up an' down,
What mobbing and what plotting!
Here politicians bribe a loun
Against his saul for voting.

It is with tolerant affection that Fergusson looks upon his

characters. He does not trouble himself to judge them.

Along with The Election, in The Weekly Magazine of 16 May, appears a good example of Fergusson's occasional poems: On the Music-bells playing yesterday forenoon, prior to Brown and Wilson's execution, on the Deacons being presented to Council. The two men had murdered one Adam Thomson in June 1771.¹ Tastelessly enough, the editor placed it just after the news report of the execution.

The Elegy on John Hogg, Late Porter to the University of St. Andrews (23 September) should be read along with the elegy on Gregory. Though Fergusson knew the two men at approximately the same time, the intervening years had matured his ability to deal with satire. The satire on Gregory is almost crude; that on John Hogg is warm and appreciative. To be sure, they were two very different personalities, but the treatment of Hogg is infinitely more artistic. Hogg was, according to Fergusson, one of the mainstays of the University. Further, he was a religious man:

Nae dominie, or wise mess John,
Was better lear'd in Solomon;
He cited proverbs one by one
 Ilk vice to tame;
He gar'd ilk sinner sigh an' groan,
 And fear hell's flame.

1. Weekly Magazine, 3 June 1773.

To Sir "I hae nae mickle skill, quo' he,
 "In what you ca' philosophy;
 Beggar's "It tells that baith the earth and sea
 "Rin round about;
 Its final "Either the Bible tells a lie,
 "Or you're a' out..."

bid for patronage. In September, the poet had presented his
 John was, at the same time, a penurious man, and Fergusson
 Poems to Sir Adam Fergusson, possibly with the same hopes.
 skillfully emphasizes the ironic contrast with biblical
 and much about the same time, his long poem, Jald Reikie,
 reference:

was dedicated, it is said, to Sir William Forbes.
 Wi' haffit locks sae smooth and sleek,
 The John look'd like ony antient Greek;
 He was a Nazarene a' the week,
 friends of Fergusson "And doughtna tell out
 A bawbee Scots to straik his cheek
 poem to the memory of Mr Till Sunday fell out.

actually For John ay lo'ed to turn the pence, pastoral, there
 Thought poortith was a great offence:
 were also "What recks tho' ye ken mood and tense?
 "A hungry weyme
 had died "For gowd wad wi' them baith dispense,
 "At ony time..."

own vivid fears of such an end, would feel the pathos of such
 Besides illustrating the penetration into character which had
 a situation, especially when it had affected a poet whom he
 developed, the poem conveys to us the nostalgic reminiscences
 admired. Cunningham also had been contented with the Old
 of the poet who, seated at his copying desk, must often have
 Playhouse in the Canongate for a time, and Woods had known him
 wandered mentally back to his University days:

2. Verse Say ye, red gowns! that aften here The Dumfries Weekly
Nagas Hae toasted bakes to Katie's beer, dated 26 September.
3. Coura Gin e'er thir days hae had their peer, right [sic] died
at Newcastle of a li Sae blyth, sae daft! ingenious Mr John
5. Cunni You'll ne'er again in life's career old for his very
 eminent pastoral tel Sit ha'f sae saft.
4. Irving, p. 11.

To Sir John Fielding, on his Attempt to suppress The Beggar's Opera (7 October)² is largely in praise of John Gay.

Its final lines to the Duke of Queensberry may have been a pastoral bid for patronage. In September, the poet had presented his Poems to Sir Adam Fergusson, possibly with the same hopes.

And much about the same time, his long poem, Auld Reikie, was dedicated, it is said, to Sir William Forbes.

The poet John Cunningham having died on 18 September,³ friends of Fergusson "prevailed upon him to compose a pastoral poem to the memory of Mr. Cunningham."⁴ Whether or not friends actually did prevail on Fergusson to write the pastoral, there

were also other reasons why he should want to do so. Cunningham and pleasing tenderness runs through the whole piece; and the had died in the bedlam at Newcastle, and the poet, with his own vivid fears of such an end, would feel the pathos of such

a situation, especially when it had affected a poet whom he admired. Cunningham also had been connected with the Old Playhouse in the Canongate for a time, and Woods had known him

Obviously, Edinburgh was not giving the Scots poems the real

2. Verses on Visiting Dumfries appeared in The Dumfries Weekly Magazine of 28 September. The poem was dated 26 September.
3. Courant, 27 September 1773: "Saturday se'nnight [sic] died at Newcastle of a lingering illness, the ingenious Mr John Cunningham, well known in the literary world for his very eminent pastoral talents." the Memory of JOHN CUNNINGHAM.
4. Irving, p. 11. "...Sold at OSSIAN's head. Price sixpence." The Scots Magazine announced the publication in September.

well. To the Memory of John Cunningham was published separately at the beginning of October.⁵ Its reversion to an English form is explainable in that it was an imitation of Corydon: A Pastoral, Cunningham's elegy to William Shenstone. It was reviewed in

The Weekly Magazine of 21 October:

"A POEM to the Memory of JOHN CUNNINGHAM. By R. FERGUSSON. 4to. 6d. Ossian's Head.

"Our author laments, in very pathetic strains, the death of Mr Cunningham, so well known to the lovers of polite learning by his pastoral poems. However much he may be esteemed as an author, yet more so was he admired as a man. Though possessed of a narrow fortune, his charity was general and extensive. His heart was always open to the needy and the indigent. But, bountiful to excess, a tear or sigh was often all he could bestow on lonely wanderers suing for relief.

"This poem is wrote in Mr Cunningham's manner; and we must own our author has succeeded in the imitation. A simplicity and pleasing tenderness runs through the whole piece; and the poet leads us so pleasantly through the wilds of fancy, that we are sorry when we finish our excursions with him to these happy regions.

"Mr Fergusson is already well known in the Poetical Department. His pieces wrote in the Scots language are perhaps equal to any of the kind this country has produced; and it is with no small surprize we see him, who has almost dedicated his talents to humour alone, shine so conspicuously in the tender elegiac."

Obviously, Edinburgh was not giving the Scots poems the real recognition they deserved.

5. Advertiser, 5-8 October 1773: "Edin. Oct. 8th, 1773.
Just Published A POEM, To the Memory of JOHN CUNNINGHAM.
By R. FERGUSSON...Sold at OSSIAN's head. Price sixpence."
The Scots Magazine announced the publication in September.

The Sitting of the Session (4 November), written just prior to the reassembling of the Court of Session on 12 November, is the counterpart to The Rising and is as stinging as the earlier poem.

The Court o' Session, weel wat I,
 Pitts ilk chiel's whittle i' the pye,
 Can criesh the slaw-gaun wheels whan dry,
 Till Session's done,
 Tho' they'll gie mony a cheep and cry
 Or twalt o' June.
 Still, the sting has more finesse; the refreshed copyist looks forward to his work with a little less resentment toward his superiors:

The lawyer's skelfs, and printer's presses
 Grain unco sair wi' weighty cases;
 The clark in toil his pleasure places,
 To thrive bedeen;
 At five-hour's bell scribes shaw their faces,
 And rake their ein.

But the lawyers are essentially the same:

The country fock to lawyers crook,
 "Ah! Weels me on your bonny buik!
 "The benmost part o' my kist nook.
 "I'll ripe for thee,
 "And willing ware my hindmost rook
 "For my decree."

My friend, who the thickest of law never try'd,
 Consider before you get in;
 Tho' judgment and sentence are passed on your side,
 By love you'll be blessed to the skin.

(Reprinted in The Advertiser, 2-5 May 1766.) Burns's Fyndings frae the Session, which had been included in Ramsay's Evergreen, is of a similar nature.

But law's a draw-well unco deep,
 Withouten rim fock out to keep;
 A donnart chiel, whan drunk, may dreep
 Fu' sleely in,
 But finds the gate baith stay and steep,
 Ere out he win.⁶

A Drink Eclogue (11 November) is another Scots "flyting eclogue." A bottle of whiskey and a bottle of French brandy flyte each other on the respective merits of the home-made versus the foreign import. In the end, the finicky pride of the brandy is deflated and exposed as a fraud when the landlady comes and discloses that what she sells for French brandy is merely colored whiskey. It is a slight piece of patriotism. To My Auld Breeks (25 November) is a wholly subjective theme on the state of the poet's trousers, pocket, and mind, a thoroughly good-natured complaint, nevertheless profoundly expressive of the poet's condition:

For wha but kens a poet's placks
 Get mony weary flaws an' cracks,
 And canna thole to hae them tint,
 As he sae seenil sees the mint?

6. One of Cunningham's fables concerns a sheep caught in a thicket:

My friend, who the thicket of law never try'd,
 Consider before you get in;
 Tho' judgment and sentence are passed on your side,
 By Jove you'll be fleeced to the skin.

(Reprinted in The Advertiser, 2-6 May 1766.) Dunbar's Tydings frae the Session, which had been included in Ramsay's Evergreen, is of a similar nature.

Rob. Fergusson's Last Will (25 November) and Codicile to Rob. Fergusson's Last Will (23 December) come as a prophecy. Did Fergusson realize that these were to be his last works, or at least the last works he would print? The doggerel couplets⁷ were, in a sense, a fitting bow. It is because we always suspect an underlying reason for the Will and Codicile's having been written that they assume a pathos. Though Fergusson had hardly more to leave than gratitude, he mentioned many of his friends in the poems, Ruddiman among others:

To Walter Ruddiman, whose pen
Still screen'd me from the Dunce's Den,
I leave of phiz a picture, saving
To him the freedom of engraving
Therefrom a copy to embellish
And give his work a smarter relish;

...

Not that I think in readers' eyes
My visage will be deem'd a prize;
But works that others would out-rival,
At glaring copperplates connive all,
And prints do well with him that led is
To shun the substance, hunt the shadows;
For if a picture, 'tis enough,
A Newton or a Jamie Duff.

7. It may have been based upon Dunbar's Testament of Mr. Andro Kennedy, available to Fergusson in The Evergreen, but the theme was common. Samuel Derrick, the poetaster of Bath, had written such a will in contemporary times. A nursery song, Robin Redbreast's Testament (obviously a folk version of Lindsay's The Testament and Complaynt of the Kingis Papyngo) must have been known to Fergusson.

The Dunce's Den was a section of The Weekly Magazine in which selections from the editor's wastebasket were placed. Jamie Duff was an idiot. Evidently the author was anticipating future publications, posthumous or otherwise.

Several undated poems appear to belong to 1773. William Stenhouse attributed The Lea-Rig, a variation on an old folksong, to Fergusson.⁸ Another song, Hallowfair, was also assigned to him by Stenhouse, on the authority of David Herd,⁹ though Herd had reprinted it without the author's name in his Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs (1776). Hallowfair lacks both subtlety and ingenuity; it is a parody on The Blythesome Bridal and, as that song does, must partake equally of Drummond of Hawthornden's Polemo Middinia; Fergusson was acquainted with both of these works.¹ It is difficult to assign either of the songs positively to Fergusson.²

A very bad drinking song ("Hollo, keep it up boys...") appeared in The Nightingale (Edinburgh 1776); it is quite obvious that it was not intended for publication.

8. Stenhouse, William, ed., The Scots Musical Museum (Edinburgh 1853), v. 4, p. 53.

9. p. 399.

1. See mention of Drummond in To the Principal and Professors. Lines from Polemo Middinia were used as a motto for The King's Birth-Day.

2. In a MS. list of the pieces which Fergusson wrote after the appearance of his Poems, Herd does not include Hallowfair (Herd presentation copy of Poems, St. Andrews University Library).

Some poems were published posthumously in the 1779 edition:

Part II of Fergusson's Poems. Ode to Horror, Ode to Disappointment, Dirge, The Author's Life, and Job, Chap. III., Paraphrased are probably the distorted offspring of 1774. Painfully subjective, they are certainly Fergusson's most mature pieces of English verse. It is readily felt that they issued from a despondent mind, an inward look at a suffering soul. The poet afterwards very ungratefully expunged.

Fergusson's Auld Reikie, notwithstanding the greater perfection of some other pieces, is his most important poem. It is the fulfillment of his laureateship and, its final form having emerged at a high point in his career, is intensely penetrating and subjective. It was published in a sixpenny pamphlet in the autumn of 1773 as Canto I of an intended longer Edinburgh magistrate, and Forbes was not that. On the other hand, Forbes was certainly a man known for his public spirit and charity. He was a Weekly Manager of the Charity Workhouse said to have been dedicated to Sir William Forbes,³ an Edinburgh banker and member of Johnson's Literary Club, but the dedication page was cancelled, probably because the selected patron did not choose to aid the poet, or because he objected to the dedication. It is possible, but not probable,

that a letter written by Alexander Dalziel to Robert Burns and

3. Irving, David, The Lives of the Scottish Poets (Edinburgh 1804), v. II, p. 423. David Thomson?

6. Minutes of the Edinburgh Assembly (MS.), Edinburgh Room, Edinburgh Public Library.

printed by James Currie refers to Forbes and the dedication:

The magistrates gave you liberty [to erect a stone on Fergusson's grave], did they? Oh generous magistrates! ***** celebrated over the three kingdoms for his public spirit, gives a poor poet liberty to raise a tomb to a poor poet's memory! most generous! ***** once upon a time gave that same poet the mighty sum of eighteen pence for a copy of his works. But then it must be considered that the poet was at this time absolutely starving, and besought his aid with all the earnestness of hunger. And over and above he received a ***** worth at least one third of the value, in exchange, but which I believe the poet afterwards very ungratefully expunged.⁴

We might indiscriminately substitute the name "Forbes" for the first asterisks, except that Currie everywhere else (and in this letter) used one asterisk for each letter of the word or name he was deleting. Further, in an editorial note, he very clearly implied that he had deleted the name of an Edinburgh magistrate,⁵ and Forbes was not that. On the other hand, Forbes was certainly a man known for his public spirit and charity. He was a Weekly Manager of the Charity Workhouse in which Fergusson later died; he was a director of the Edinburgh Assembly, an institution established primarily for the support of the Royal Infirmary and the Charity Workhouse.⁶ Still, until the original of Dalziel's letter is

4. Currie, James, ed., The Works of Robert Burns (Liverpool 1800), v. II, p. 71. An article by J. C. Ewing in The Burns Chronicle (1933) identified the letter writer as Dalziel.

5. William Trotter, or David Thomson?

6. Minutes of the Edinburgh Assembly (MS.), Edinburgh Room, Edinburgh Public Library.

found, we cannot know.⁷ The two known copies of the first edition of Auld Reikie (at Harvard University and at the British Museum) do not have a dedication page, but the signature letters indicate that a page has been cancelled. The pamphlet version (Canto I) of "Auld Reikie" contained 328 lines, but Thomas Ruddiman, in editing the 1779 Poems, that added 40 lines, bringing the poem to a definite close. These added lines must be considered the final part of an earlier, perhaps shorter, version which the poet did complete. When did he originally write this? The date can be established on the basis of internal evidence. Lines 7 and 8,

O'er lang frae thee the Muse has been
Sae frisky on the Simmer's green,

suggest that he had just come from his Shenstonean pastoral the bridge. The Theatre was forced to move back to its old, productions, the bulk of which appeared before 1772 and in and dangerous, quarters in the Canongate for at least part of early 1773. But such a theory is rather weak. More certain its 1769-70 season. There were probably many more important dating can be drawn from lines 333 and 334 of the poem:

The spacious Brig neglected lies,
Tho' plagu'd wi' pamphlets, dunned wi' cries... that

The "brig" was the new North Bridge which extended from the

resumed in May 1770, and it continued until July 1772, when

7. At any rate, Dalziel made some serious errors in his letter (about the cost of the Poems, and probably about Fergusson's starvation). We should have to take it with a grain of salt were it found. Currie indicated that the same letter
8. contained anecdotes of Fergusson which he did not include
9. in his transcription.

Old Town to the embryonic New Town. This was under construction in 1769, but in that year the north abutments began to subside into the soft mud upon which they rested. These were days before city engineers: the Town Council actually had refused to inspect the work on grounds that an inspection would be offensive to the contractor. The Town Council nevertheless warned citizens that the bridge should not be used. This warning was generally ignored, largely because it was the most convenient road to various places often visited, such as the Theatre Royal which had just been built (1768) at the other end of the bridge. On 3 August 1769 the north end of the bridge collapsed; five people were killed.⁸ While the wrangling and investigation continued over several months' time, nothing was done immediately to repair the bridge. The Theatre was forced to move back to its old, and dangerous, quarters in the Canongate for at least part of its 1769-70 season. There were probably many more important delays in the building of the New Town. The outcry was general, and it was in this period of dispute, accusation, and rage that the first square (St. James) was commenced by Walter Fergusson wrote his own sharp protest. Work on the bridge was resumed in May 1770, and it continued until July 1772, when it was announced the bridge would be opened for foot traffic.⁹

^{8.} Courant, 5 August 1769.

^{9.} 11 July 1772.

Fergusson, then, must have written his lines between August 1769 and May 1770, and when he was revising Auld Reikie in 1773, he deleted them because they no longer applied.¹ It may be thought that Ruddiman, when adding the last lines in the 1779 edition, had a manuscript version which was in all respects like the 1773 pamphlet except for the final deletions. But this is not possible. Internal dating again suggests a very thorough 1773 revision from the c. 1770 form. There occurs in the body of the poem a eulogy of the Cape Club and, since Fergusson did not become a fully initiated and active member of that club until 1773, these lines of praise cannot have been written before early 1773. And though James Craig, the architect of the New Town, laid the foundation stone of its first house on 26 October 1767,² Fergusson's lines

While our new city spreads around
Her bonny wings on fairy ground.
This and other poems of the same nature are, however, remote most likely refer to a much later time, for it was in June 1773 that the first square (St. James) was commenced by Walter the immediate impetus or specific incidents. Charles Salmon,

1. This theory may be weakened by the fact that there were also protests in 1773 about the lack of maintenance of the bridge (see Dr. John Oliver's essay in S. G. Smith's Robert Fergusson, p. 86). But this outcry was minor, and the main point is that Fergusson deleted the bridge references when he published his first Canto in 1773.
2. Caledonian Mercury, 28 October 1767.

Fergusson. Even this was delayed somewhat longer when a court action was initiated on the part of the Heriot Hospital, which had feued the land for agricultural development only.³ Beyond this factual method of assigning a late date for the revision, there appear some less tangible indications, such as general maturity and a strong preoccupation with morbid subjects, most logically belonging to Fergusson's final two years of life. Certainly the manuscript version Ruddiman used for the additional lines was something quite different, but the publisher required its material only insofar as he could eke out the single canto into a full and nicely finished poem.

When his Muse left "the Simmer's green" to praise his smoke-laden Auld Reikie, Fergusson was relinquishing one English tradition for another--fortunately one which he could transform to Scots and master skillfully. His debt to Gay's Trivia and Ramsay's Edinburgh's Address to the Country is readily seen. This and other poems of the same nature are, however, remote ancestors. They may have supplied an initial idea, but not the immediate impetus or specific incidents. Charles Salmon, Fergusson's friend in Dumfries, wrote a parody of The Deserted

4. Lives of Scottish Poets by The Society of Ancient Scots, 1877. Another possible source may be Thomas

3. Courant, 2 June 1773.

5. Courant, 5 March 1773: "On Monday will be published [8 March 1773] by A. KINKAID and W. CRECH, Price 1s. 6d. TOWN EPILOGUES... By the Hon. ANDREW ERSKINE." A copy of this poem is in the National Library of Scotland.

Village, and this he called Auld Reikie.⁴ Unfortunately, the work was not published, but the suggestion is clear. Ideas from Philips' Splendid Shilling are obvious, also. Early in 1773 Andrew Erskine published his Town Eclogues,⁵ a work inspired by Swift's request of Gay for a "Newgate Pastoral." There are four eclogues, one of which deals with street walkers and another of which treats undertakers. The latter was reprinted in The Edinburgh Advertiser of 11-15 June 1773. Scattered ideas and references in Auld Reikie may owe something to Erskine. Fergusson's poem, in another sense, owes nothing to its known sources, for it surpasses them all in quality--and, at that, it suffers from a sketchiness and a rambling not unlike Cowper's The Task.

The poem is written in rhymed couplets and it begins on a morning-noon-night plan or progression. Based upon this schedule, it roams about the city describing not things, but personalities: it is a human rather than an inanimate poem.

Now morn, with bonnie purple-smiles,
Kisses the air-cock o' St. Giles;
Rakin their ein, the servant lasses
Early begin their lies and clashes...

4. Lives of Scottish Poets by The Society of Ancient Scots, pt. III, p. 174. Another possible source may be Thomas Mercer's Arthur's Seat.
5. Courant, 6 March 1773: "On Monday will be published [8 March 1773] by A. KINKAID and W. CREECH, Price 1s. 6d. TOWN ECLOGUES...By the Hon. ANDREW ERSKINE." A copy of this poem is in the National Library of Scotland.

Next, 72? His own delicate constitution and the frequency of

premature death. Now stair-head critics, senseless fools, upon
 Censure their aim, and pride their rules,
 him. At Luckenbooths, wi' glouring eye,
 Their neighbors sma'est faults descry...

The flavor of satire is present in all of the portraits. "Whan
 Phoebus blinks wi' warmer ray" the lawyers adjourn to the Cross,
 their gathering place, "their wigs to shaw," while poor
 subordinates accomplish their duties for them. The afternoon
 is treated in but a few lines. Nightfall comes quickly and
 we have the sharply engraved Hogarthian delineation of the
 macaroni.⁶

Naturally, the ubiquitous clubs of Edinburgh appear now.
 They are treated in lines 131 to 166, the last of these lines,
 however, containing morbid meditations upon death. The subject
 of death continues for a number of lines beyond that, and the
 transition from the clubs to death is so imperfect that the
 gloom of it thrusts itself as relentlessly upon the reader as
 it obviously has upon the poet. He pictures himself stepping
 out upon a morning "fu' blyth" and then suddenly encountering
 a funeral procession: "straight a painted corp he sees." It
 is psychologically arresting. How did the sensitive Fergusson
 react to the recent death of his nephew, David Inverarity,

6. Is it possible that Christopher Anstey's Liberality, or the Decayed Macaroni (London 1785) was influenced at all by this or other of Fergusson's poems?

in 1772?⁷ His own delicate constitution and the frequency of premature death undoubtedly enforced such forebodings upon him. At the point where the clubs are abandoned, the morning-noon-night scheme is left behind.

We are now, incongruously, conducted to the vegetable market (lines 195-230), which was held on the High Street between St. Giles and the Tron Kirk.⁸ This scene is obviously out of place, for the proper location of the market should be after line 58, which ends the exposition of the morning scene. Since the smells of Edinburgh, already treated in lines 40 and following, are prevalent in the verses, there is hardly a doubt that Fergusson had disjointed the sections very illogically. In seeking a reason for this, we must not overlook the physical and mental breakdown which began to oppress him in late 1773. The description of Mary is so gentle and pleasant a picture that we are almost shocked to find it amidst the sounds, display, and smell of the market place. The lines are truly

7. The Parish Register, Co. of Edinburgh, runs thus:
"Inverarity 16 [July 1772] David Inverarity Son to
David east from Hays Bur: place aged one year Teething."
He was buried in the family plot where William Fergusson
had already been interred.

8. Grosart, Works, p. 133.

9. The song O gin my love were you red rose, collected by David Herd (Herd, hans, Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts, Edinburgh 1904, pp. 98, 99), contains two lines from which this idea was undoubtedly taken. This is interesting evidence of Fergusson's acquaintance with Scots folk song.

beautiful:

Is there on earth that can compare
Wi' Mary's shape, and Mary's air,
Save the empurpl'd speck, that grows
In the saft faulds of yonder rose?⁹

The dirt of Edinburgh claims several complacent lines
before Fergusson pounces satirically upon Sunday manners.

On Sunday here, an alter'd scene
O' men and manners meets our ein:
Ane wad maist trow some people chose
To change their faces wi' their clo'es,

...

But there's an unco dearth o' grace,
That has nae mansion but the face,
And never can obtain a part
In benmost corner of the heart.

Undoubtedly, here are some of the best lines in the work. What
follows is deep in autobiographical significance:

Why should religion make us sad,
If good frae Virtue's to be had?

Sunday brings thoughts of city and country walks, and Fergusson
discusses his preference for Arthur's Seat. And if a shower of
rain should come, he would go to Holyroodhouse

And gie to musing a' the day,
Lamenting what auld Scotland knew
Blen days for ever frae her view...

9. The song O gin my love were yon red rose, collected by David Herd (Hecht, Hans, Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts, Edinburgh 1904, pp. 98, 99), contains two lines from which this idea was undoubtedly taken. This is interesting evidence of Fergusson's acquaintance with Scots folk song.

The debtors go to Holyroodhouse for sanctuary: Fergusson thinks of his own poverty. Of St. Mary's Wynd he says, "...mony a hungry writer there" goes to sell his old clothes for second-hand ones in less threadbare straits.

Ye rich fock, look na wi' disdain
Upo' this ancient brokage lane!
For naked poets are supply'd
With what you to their wants deny'd.

Is this merely poetic expression?¹

The do Peace to thy shade, thou wale o' men,
Drummond! relief to poortith's pain...

The few lines which complete the 1773 Canto I praise Sir George Drummond, Lord Provost of Edinburgh for six terms of office, the last of which was from 1762 to 1764.² He was a rabid anti-Jacobite and the planner of the New Town.

Nae mair shall Glasgow striplings threep
Their city's beauty and its shape,
While our new city spreads around
Her bonny wings on fairy ground.

That was the end of the 1773 version. Now the added lines fit perfectly and, though anachronistic for the year 1773, certainly they formed a part of the eulogy to Drummond.

With that past Lord Provost as his good example, Fergusson

1. References to his poverty appear in several poems: To My Auld Brecks, The Sitting of the Session, Ode to the Bee, etc. Here the inception probably is from Philips: Fergusson's line "And shake my garret wi' their cry..." seems a paraphrase of "...a Dun.../To my aerial citadel ascends..."

2. [Anonymous], The Lord Provosts of Edinburgh (Edinburgh 1932), pp. 63-65.

attacks municipal laxity and corruption.

The final eighteen lines are a definite completion:

To sing yet meikle does remain
Undecent for a modest strain;

...

Therefore the stews remain unsung,
And bawds in silence drop their tongue.
Reikie, farewell, I ne'er could part
Wi' thee but wi' a dowy heart...

The description of the poem's progress betrays Auld Reikie's basic sketchiness and structural lack of completion, though it is difficult to accuse Fergusson of haste or inability to master a medium of sustained exposition in rhymed couplets. Despite observable faults, no one can deny the poem's success. The rich and haphazard succession of sketches may even gain from the lack of formalized plot. The power of the piece is the same power which the poet always maintains: the perspicacious portrayal of his contemporaries and man in general through them. The poem is something far deeper than a mere bit of local journalism. Edinburgh is painted for the people in it. The final revelation is of the poet's profound attachment to his city, the depth of his love being measured in the depth and fineness of his expression.

The autobiographical elements of the poem are numerous.

As previously observed, its disjointed construction may reflect

Fergusson's mental condition in 1773. Wherever the poet is satirical, we can hear him saying a great deal about himself. The convincing harshness at points in the poem cannot but reflect real grievances, real personal ideals. When he speaks of poverty, Fergusson may not actually be saying that he is hungry or that he is ill-clad, but he is saying that a good poet deserves more of the world; his poetry has been unrewarded and he himself knows how to estimate his own work, for he has struggled to make himself a poet; he has not put anything before the public which he has not deemed good enough. Where is his reward?

genius had once been rewarded * * *

The poems must be viewed chronologically if a proper appreciation of Fergusson's genius is to be reached. Unlike most poets, he never arrived at a prime, so that his work must be looked upon as an upward road with an unfulfilled promise. No one poem is faultless, but each succeeding poem usually shows a diligent attitude toward improvement and an endeavor for perfection.

Fergusson's work in English served only to bring him to a mastery of the technical aspects of poetry. His work

in Scots was always a studious concentration, but it was not until he wrote The King's Birth-Day that he really applied his knowledge and his powers. By 1773, a new emphasis on artistic expression in Scots was obvious in his work; in the matter of language, form, and subject matter, it was clear that Fergusson had become a poet in the Scots tradition.

How discouraging it must have been for Fergusson to know this when no one else would recognize it fully! There probably was only one other person living near his own time who did recognize it in part. A century or more was required for most of his fellow countrymen to realize that a glow of genius had once been amongst them.

And Death, wild Death, drive me the ghastly train,
Watch'd the brave slumber of young'st men.

With him who night by night is snatch'd away,

Fergusson very seldom complained publicly; but his amazingly pathetic lines in To My Child Andrew were written in his despondent mood, strike us with all the more force:

You've seen me weep for sorrow's sake,
Wi' heart as hale as London's street,
And face as open, free and bright,
Nor thought that sorrow's power was nigh;
But the sweetest smile was soon
Like gowan in December's frost.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1773 was Robert Fergusson's year of outward triumph in personal relationships and in poetry. It was also the year in which his mental decline began to be visible. Although he continued to write his finest poetry, occasional verses foreshadowed the decline as 1773 spun itself out. We have the preoccupation with morbidity in Auld Reikie. The description of city slumber in The Town and Country Contrasted (late 1772?) emphasizes that he was concerned, perhaps tortured, by the state of his health:

There ling'ring sickness held his feeble court,
Rejoicing in the havock he had made;
And Death, grim Death! with all his ghastly train,
Watch'd the broke slumbers of Edina's sons.

...

With him who night by night in sickness pines.

Fergusson very seldom complains publicly; thus the tragically pathetic lines in To My Auld Brecks, where he writes of his despondent moods, strike us with all the more force:

You've seen me round the bickers reel
Wi' heart as hale as temper'd steel,
And face sae apen, free and blyth,
Nor thought that sorrow there cou'd kyth;
But the niest moment this was lost,
Like gowan in December's frost.

As we shall see, he harbored a long-standing fear of mental collapse.

While such fears were slowly asserting their depressing effects upon his genius, nevertheless he was physically active throughout the year. He liked sojourns to the country, proof of this being his poems dispatched to The Weekly Magazine from "Broomhouse, East Lothian" (Ode to the Bee, dated 26 April 1773) and "North-Belton" (Tea, A Poem, 2 August, and Ode to the Gowdspink, 9 August). He journeyed also to Baledmund, a farm owned by Edmund Fergusson, who was possibly Robert's uncle, or perhaps a cousin connected with the Auchindoir Fergussons. As late as September he journeyed to Dumfries.

In contrast to that salubrious influence was the social life of Edinburgh. Robert's triumph there was a boomerang which was rapidly telling on him both physically and mentally. His biographers agree that he was excessive--"dissipation" is the word used. It would not be possible to argue the excesses, for the corroboration of them came from the poet's family and friends. Pinkerton wrote that the poet spent much time over a "bowl of punch," and his information came from George Paton.¹

1. [Pinkerton, John], Ancient Scottish Poems never before in print (London M.DCC.LXXXVI), v. 1, p. cxi.

Campbell repeated the charge on the authority of Fergusson's sister. Irving, too, relied on that authority, and when David Herd wrote a manuscript critique of Irving's Lives of the Scottish Poets, he did not dispute the rather harsh accusation.² Nor did Inverarity deny it. Peterkin took his information from a friend of the poet, probably James Grahame. Though Grahame strongly protested Peterkin's sharpness before publication, the life probably had his approval when it came from the printers. In a letter, Hary gently admonished his brother, advising that he should not fall into bad habits: Robert's habits must have been reported to him from home.

The word "dissipation" implies that the excesses would have interfered materially with the poet's work. At this time his output was about one poem a week, all these poems being of good quality and showing no artistic deterioration. "...he continued almost daily to write verses on passing occurrences and incidental topics."³ The drinking may have been physically destructive and mentally distressing to an advanced degree, but it was not "dissipation." It was during 1773 that his drinking was reaching its peak and when, very late in that

2. National Library MS. 891.

3. Peterkin, p. 30.

year, he began to realize its effect on his health, he gave it up. It was above a full year before his death that he set himself this more rigorous standard.

The importance of the excesses lies not in the effect, but in the cause. What led Fergusson to them? If we had a tendency to romanticize, we might say they were an escape from grimness, artistic frustration, reaction to a burdensome daily routine. "Oh! Sir, anything to forget my poor mother and these aching fingers," said Fergusson himself.⁴ But there must have been more to it. The whole fabric of Fergusson's life indicates a basic insecurity: his abandonment of the ministry, his failure to settle in some position immediately after finishing the university, his love affair with a woman so much older than himself, his final madness. Such a person would be weak in his moral constitution. Let us not forget, however, that Edinburgh was--and is--a hard-drinking city, and that municipal habits can be contagious. Fergusson's talent for companionship was a factor which drew him toward the opportunities: a lack of sober steadiness can be discerned in his script on some of the Cape Club petitions. After he

4. Grosart, Works, p. lxxxiii. This information was supplied by Miss Ruddiman. We must remember that she was but a very young girl when she knew Fergusson.

had finished his usual sixpenny worth of food and libations at Lucky Middlemast's, he was "sometimes prevailed upon to outsit his friends by other persons who came later, and, for the sake of his company, intreated him to join them in further potations."⁵

By autumn the extent of deterioration was profound, and Fergusson was undergoing medical care.⁶ In September, when preparations for the general elections of the next year were being made, Fergusson accompanied some friends "to one of the eastern counties" (possibly Fife⁷) to engage in the riot which was customary. Our account is from Peterkin:

While his physical system was under the influence of medicine, for his recovery from the consequences of ebriety and folly, he was unfortunately enticed to accompany some gentlemen, who were interested in an election business, to one of the eastern counties of Scotland. On this expedition he was much exposed to the riotous enjoyments incident to

5. Chambers, pp. 303, 304.

6. Peterkin, p. 50.

7. McDiarmid, pp. 70, 71. "By accounts from different parts of the country we learn, that great preparations are making for the general election, the gentlemen of landed property splitting votes, &c. and the intended candidates endeavouring to fill up the town councils of the different burghs with their dependents. It is thought, from the present appearance, that there will be more hot work, dissipation, bribery and corruption at the next election, than has been seen in this country." (Weekly Magazine, 9 September 1773.)

Ibid. Irving
that Fergusson
restored himself

such occasions; and these, in conjunction with his disordered health, produced a feverishness and decrepitude of mind amounting nearly to insanity.⁸

There is a question as to the exact dating of this excursion. While it may have happened at any time after September, the most likely date would be December 1773, or even January of the following year. The poetry produced between September and December 1773 is not consistent with a "decrepitude of mind amounting nearly to insanity." Among the poems of the last two months of the year are The Sitting of the Session, To My Auld Breeks, the Last Will and its Codicile. But Inverarity points out that Fergusson was under some tension even as early as October:

Writing to a friend in October 1773, he uses these words, "The town is dull at present; I am thoroughly idle, and that fancy which has often afforded me pleasure, almost denies to operate but on the gloomiest subjects." And in the same letter he thus subscribes himself, "Your afflicted humble servant."⁹

It is unfortunate that the entire letter has not survived. Inverarity also relates that Fergusson went to the country to "divert his memory from brooding on actions to which a disordered fancy attached an imaginary guilt."¹ The attempt

8. Peterkin, pp. 50, 51.

9. Scots Magazine, November 1801.

1. Ibid. Irving (Lives of the Scottish Poets, p. 422) says that Fergusson took lodgings away from town in order to restore himself.

2. Scots Magazine, November 1801.

at recuperation was unsuccessful, and the "disease of mind" which drove him into the country, in three days drove him back again to the town..."²

Among the most telling pieces of evidence of this period is a poetical letter communicated by "J. O." to The Scotsman of 7 March 1887. "J. O.'s" communication follows in full:

5 March, 1887

"Sir,

The accompanying poem is by Fergusson, from an unpublished manuscript shown to me within the last few days; and thinking it would be of interest to Scottish literateurs and to Scotsmen generally, because of Fergusson's connection with Robert Burns, I have sent it with the hope that you may find space for it in your columns.--I am, &c. J. O.

Dear Collector,--

B. Fergusson.

Edinburgh, When teased with vapors, urged with spleen,
And clouds of gloomy thoughts conven;
When youthful blood, once child of fun,
The "Collector" Weeps o'er the mirthful glass that's run,
transcribing With Nature fading from his sight,
He views the day by candle light:

the scribe What then can cheer the forlorn breast
Of him whose mind's unknown to rest,
haste. (This If friendship can't extort a smile,
The significance of the letter is obvious: Fergusson himself And dissipate his grief the while?

admits to "When I my friend had cause to blame,
Straight to my aid his letter came
himself lend With quantity of precious ore,
his new rose That's made me happy heretofore.
Nor could the goldenæra last;
From COIN then DISSIPATION rose,
My CRUELEST and WORST of foes.

2. Scots Magazine, November 1801.

about his Thanks to the donor, though his present should
 Shine not as erst with aspect pleasant;
 blame so much But let my breast be tied to care, and would
 of fees," And I be plunged in worst despair,
 he had of complaining! When gratitude shall THIS forsake, oblige a man
 Nor thanks for friendly favours wake.

My compliments to all the folks
 There With whom I've drunk and cracked my jokes;
 need money? Tell them, O tell, too sadly true,
 work was of That lips in wine I scarce embrue.
 support him Nor dare I join the list with Backus,
 Fergusson was Afraid new horrors should attack us,
 Be blyth and crack my jokes again. Till health again with winning face
 My brain shall clear, my nerves shall brace;
 Then will I with indulgent vein
 Be blyth and crack my jokes again.

Do write often; you scarce know how much the news from your
 part of the country touch me. Nothing better for vapours
 which burden me than news from old acquaintance.--Yours,
 in the horrors,

R. Fergusson.

Edinburgh, 26th November 1778.

The "Collector" is certainly Lorimer. "J. O.'s" mistake in
 transcribing the date is a natural one, for Fergusson had
 the scribal idiosyncrasy of closing his 3's when he wrote in
 haste. (This occurs several times on the Cape Club petitions.)

The significance of the letter is obvious: Fergusson himself
 admits to "dissipation" (though his intense preoccupation with
 himself leads him to exaggeration). He informs Lorimer of

his new resolution not to drink, and he reveals his own fears
 as being Fergusson's last scribal work at the Commissary
 Office, but the document is not in his hand.

about his mental state. It is interesting that he should blame so much of his trouble on his "cruellest and worst of foes," drink. But how light-hearted and noble a manner he had of complaining!

There is another significant point. Why did Fergusson need money? Undoubtedly he was out of work, or perhaps his work was of such an occasional nature that it could not support him. In the letter of October 1773, given by Inverarity, Fergusson wrote that the town was "idle." This could not have been in reference to the social life, which was then far from idle. It must have been that he was not employed. Lorimer's generous gift was given to relieve the poet's financial necessities. At what time Fergusson left the Commissary Office cannot be known, since all records in his script considerably predate the crucial period of 1773-1774.³

The encounter with the Reverend Doctor John Brown of Haddington probably is related to this period. It was Campbell who recounted it, assigning the incident to 1774:

It happened in the Autumn of 1774, while on a visit to a friend in the neighbourhood of Haddington, that one day, as young Fergusson was sauntering near the church-yard

3. McDiarmid (p. 68) notes a document of 30 December 1773 as being Fergusson's last scribal work at the Commissary Office, but the document is not in his hand.

of that town, that a person of a sudden joined him, who accosted him in a polite, and familiar manner. The solemnity of the scene naturally suggested a conversation, rather of a moral cast, which, by degrees, became abstract and gloomy. The stranger turned out to be a pious divine, of the sect called Seceders from the church of Scotland; his name was Brown, author of several works in divinity, well known among the true believers of that sect. Mortality and a judgment to come were the topics our divine chose to expatiate on; and bring home to Fergusson. These topics seemed to sink deep in the mind of our poet, and they parted; the one, convinced he had found a lost sheep, the other, that he had been led too far astray, to find favour in the sight of the chief shepherd of Israel. He returned to his mother's house in all the agonies of religious horror; and soon sunk into a state of complete despondency, which at times was contrasted with smiles, mixed with contempt and scorn: his malady had now made so rapid a progress, that confirmed derangement was but too evident; nights and days passed in total abstinence and want of sleep, all the while speaking aloud, and, alas! at times so outrageous, as to require force to keep him from doing violence.⁴

Irving refuted Campbell's date, revising it to 1772, and he remarked, quite truly, that Fergusson's insanity did not spring from Dr. Brown's aggression, though he did admit that the conversation "had then made some impression on [Fergusson's] mind."⁵ When Sommers dealt with the incident, he would not at all credit that it had happened. He writes that he had met Fergusson on his return from Haddington and no mention had been made of such an incident. But Sommers was a friend of the Brown family and was obviously bent on

4. Campbell, p. 296.

5. Irving, p. 13.

exculpating the minister. The weight of the argument is that some such conversation did take place. The Fergussons had Haddington acquaintances, and Robert must have gone there more than once. He may have travelled there to see William Welch, a young minister at Haddington and a friend, or to visit some of his father's old business connections, such as William Baillie, the brother of Robert Baillie. If he chanced upon Brown, a stern, self-made man of tight religious views, there is little doubt as to the conversation which would evolve:

Many stories are told of casual meetings with people whom Brown persuaded to take a more serious view of life. Once David Hume heard him preach, and was so impressed that he is said to have remarked: "That old man speaks as if Christ stood at his elbow!"⁶

Since the minister was opposed to all forms of secular literature which were "apt to infect with their defilement,"⁷ Fergusson presented a logical target for his moralizing.

It should be remembered that the poet's own family gave the story to Campbell and to Irving. At any rate, Sommers' vindication of Brown was unnecessary, for an incident of

6. Gray, W. F., History of Haddington (Edinburgh 1944), p. 35.

7. DNB, v. VII, p. 14.

this nature could not have been a major cause of insanity, which ever seems to have diminished the fearful gloom of whatever its temporary effect. ~~...ing rays of genuine religion charmed his bosom; no sounds of praise gladdened his heart,~~ and It is curious that the following report from Peterkin the sorrows which oppressed him. ~~...Fergusson's religion,~~ should bear a similarity to the Brown encounter:

"In the month of December, 1773 (says the gentleman to whom I allude [Grahame?]), I met with Mr Fergusson in Edinburgh, seemingly in good health, though I observed him to be more serious and thoughtful than formerly: and in the month of March succeeding, I also met with him. He was then very poorly, and, in the course of a long walk, he freely communicated the state of his mind, and also the situation he had been in for some time." The substance of that conversation is partly given in the preceding pages [which refer to Fergusson's feelings of religious confusion], being a detail of the circumstances connected with the unfortunate complaint with which Fergusson was afflicted, and his account of the electioneering excesses in which he had partaken. He imputed the decayed state of his body to these circumstances, and said, he was afraid, that not this consequence alone had arisen from them; for he feared they had also affected his head. He seemed, indeed, to be quite aware that his mind was in disorder, and he anticipated, with terror, the confinement in a mad-house, which he foresaw would be unavoidable.

He also introduced the Christian Religion, and conversed with much earnestness on some of its fundamental doctrines. Upon a particular occasion, which he specified, he said a Mr Ferrier, at or near St Andrews, had alarmed and rather displeased him, by maintaining what are usually denominated the orthodox tenets of our Scotch creeds: and Fergusson appeared to differ, in a very considerable degree, from the commonly received notions on these subjects. He did not seem to be satisfied of the necessity of the fall of man, and of a mediatorial sacrifice for human iniquity; and he questioned, with considerable boldness, the consistency of such doctrines, with the attributes of divine wisdom and goodness. At the same time, however, he confessed the imperfect nature of human intellect, and the unfathomable depth of

all such enquiries. This is the only gleam of infidelity which ever seems to have diminished the fearful gloom of superstitious terror: no consoling rays of genuine religion charmed his bosom; no sounds of peace gladdened his heart, and enabled him to sustain, with fortitude and calmness, the sorrows which oppressed him...Fergusson's religion, at this time, was the religion of a man in despair.⁸

Possibly a confusion exists as to whom Fergusson met and the location of the meeting. The minister involved in Peterkin's story was probably Robert Ferrier who, oddly enough, was a member of a dissenting church, as was Brown.⁹

The "imaginary guilt" of which Inverarity spoke was by this time (early 1774) telling upon the poet's reason.

Actual derangement was becoming evident in his actions.

One night as he slept, a pet starling, kept in a room adjoining his own, was devoured by a cat which had entered the house by the chimney. Awakened by the screams of the bird, Fergusson soon learned the cause, and "he began seriously to reflect how often he, an immortal and accountable being, had in the hour of intemperance set death at defiance..."¹

The effect of these thoughts, we are told, was to depress him utterly and to keep him away from all society. On one

8. Peterkin, pp. 54, 55.

9. See Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae, v. V, p. 219, and McDiarmid, p. 71.

1. Gleig, p. 648.

2. Tennant, William Burns, and his contemporaries, Journal, December 1831.

occasion he met his friend Woods "below the North Bridge," and he informed him that he had "discovered one of the reprobates who had crucified our Saviour, and that in order to have him disposed of according to law, he was making all possible haste to lodge the information with Lord Kames..."² (The anecdote gains credibility in that he actually was on the right road to where Lord Kames was then residing.) Yet another time, he approached a group of friends to tell them that he had just been attacked by some Irish students who had decapitated him, but that he had retrieved his head and restored it to its proper position.³

No more poetry was to appear in The Weekly Magazine, although certain poems (Ode to Horror, A Dirge, The Author's Life, and Job, Chap. III) seem logically to belong to the early part of 1774. The Magazine's readers noticed the lack and made protest. But Fergusson was abandoning them completely. He

burnt every scrap [of poetry] with his own hand; and while in the act of so doing, he was heard to say, "I am satisfied--I feel some consolation in never having written any thing against religion." Soon after the religious horror had

2. Irving, p. 14. The Scots Magazine, November 1801.

3. [Tennant, William], "Anecdotes of Ferguson [sic], Burns, and his schoolfellows," The Edinburgh Literary Journal, December 1831.

seized him, he got hold of a bible, and kept constantly reading it.⁴

Several humorous conjectures to explain Fergusson's absence from the poetry pages were made by "Caius": he reported that "a certain celebrated poet has engaged to translate the Directory [Peter Williamson's]...into English verse. It is to consist of twenty-four cantos, in the stanza of Spenser's Fairy Queen."⁵ Another facetious comment anticipated Walter Scott's idea that Fergusson was the laureate of the City Guard:

And It is reported among the literati, that, at the earnest desire of Mr R. F-----n, P[oet]. L[aureate]. there will be speedily published by John Richard Bushby, A. M. a new and impartial History of the City Guard, with the heroic actions and martial achievements of the valiant and sprightly corps, from the earliest accounts to the present time.⁶

A letter from "Signor Piano," dated "Lanerk [sic], Feb. 7," inquired in a postscript: "...--Pray is your agreeable poet R. F. quite sunk, or dead in law? A lady told me, if

he is to write any more, she would handsomely subscribe,

4. Campbell, p. 299.

5. Weekly Magazine, 6 January 1774.

6. Ibid.

that he might not want a pair of new breeks."⁷

Despite his now obvious madness, he remained at home.

For a short time he recovered his reason. We learn this fact from a poem which appeared in The Caledonian Mercury on 9 July 1774: To Mr. R. Fergusson: On his Recovery.

The verses were signed "W".--possibly William Woods:

And may thy Friends the joyful news believe!
Dost thou to perfect sense and feeling live?
Has Pain, Despair, and Melancholy fled,
That shook their gloomy Horrors round thy bed?

...

And there were twenty-six more such lines (see Appendix L).

We will remember that it was on 2 July that the Grand Cape had voted to turn the proceeds of its fines over to "the benefit and Assistance of a Young Gentleman a member of the Cape who has been a considerable time past in distress."

A disastrous event soon shattered all hope of eventual

7. 24 February 1774. In the Magazine of 5 May of the same year, the column "To our Correspondents" carried this item: "R. F.'s Soliloquy is abundantly rhapsodical; but how far short of Hervey!" On the face of it, it would seem to be a reference to Fergusson, but that column was solely dedicated to those who submitted material to the magazine more or less anonymously and whose offerings were not published. Fergusson would not have hesitated to give his work directly to Ruddiman over his signature. The Edinburgh Magazine and Review (September 1773) also notes "Meditation in the style of Harvey...by W. Weathercock..."

amelioration.⁸ One evening, as Robert was leaving the house of friends he had been visiting, he fell down the stair and injured his head.⁹ He was carried home in an "insensible" condition, not realizing what had happened to him.¹ He was suffering traumatic shock and, while it was in no sense the cause of his final madness, it was the immediate prologue.

To recapitulate briefly: 1773 was Fergusson's most creative year, although his poetry was produced against a background of disappointments. His drinking and his

8. Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 122) quotes something of interest: "Many lovers of poetry will feel regret to know that Mr. Robert Fergusson, the author of some of the most natural and humorous poems that have appeared of late years, has been seized with a very dangerous illness." This he attributes to The Caledonian Mercury of 28 July 1774. But there was no issue of that date, and I have been unable to find the quotation elsewhere. Other of Grosart's quotations likewise cannot be located, and his errors in documentation indicate his carelessness, if not actual literary dishonesty. It is possible that the above item does exist and, if so, it might serve to date the occurrence of Fergusson's accident.
9. Some biographers say "down" or "on" a stair, and Sommers says "from" a stair. On the authority of Miss Ruddiman, Grosart (Works, p. xcv) states that he entangled "his foot with a rod-knob, on the head of a staircase." On no authority whatsoever, we have the story that he tripped on a carpet (University of Toronto Quarterly, January 1948). The worn condition of ill-lighted turnpike stairs in Edinburgh is in itself the most logical explanation.
1. Gleig (p. 648): "...from the loss of blood he became delirious."

social life were reaching a serious point which he himself recognized, but his physical activities were not impaired through most of that year. By October, in the use of the word "afflicted," he complained of mental difficulties, and by November he was at least in a neurotic state which he designated "the horrors." He probably was unemployed from October onwards. According to Peterkin's informant, Fergusson had lost his reason between December 1773 and March 1774, his already unstable condition having been aggravated by one or two unfortunate occurrences which assumed unnatural and morbid proportions in his mind. We know that by 2 July he had "been a considerable time past in distress." Following a very short recovery, the head injury, received on the stair, probably in July, plunged him into a lunatic state from which he was not to recover.

* * *

2. King Fergus I. Hary humorously refers to the legendary

Records of lesser moment are related to the year 1774.

In the same issue of The Caledonian Mercury which printed Woods' lines on Fergusson's recovery (9 July), the following advertisement appeared:

3. Courant, 5 January 1771. It was first under the command of Captain Glover and later under Captain Meadows.
4. Admiralty Commission and Warrent Books, 6/20, p. 284, Public Record Office.

30 March 1774. To all Lovers of the Pronging Cane.²

By letters from the Son of the Ancient, brother to the celebrated Rob. Fergusson, lately emerged from obscurity, we learn, that he soon intends to enter Edina sword in hand. Those who would wish to parry his thrusts, may call upon all or any of the booksellers in town, where they will see his way prepared with

his advertisement A DICTIONARY,
Explaining the terms, guards, and positions used in the art of the Small Sword. By Harry Fergusson.
Ah me! what perils do environ
The man that meddles with cold iron!
Hudibras.

The words "lately emerged from obscurity," since they are italicized, probably refer to Robert. In his letter of October 1773, Hary had signified his desire to leave the Navy. By this time he had served six years, first on the Augusta, later on the Salisbury, and finally on the Tartar, a frigate of 28 guns, which was recommissioned in January 1771.³ He had received his warrant as Master-at-Arms on 12 July 1770⁴ (and this was confirmed on the Tartar on November 1774).

2. King Fergus I. Hary humorously refers to the legendary first king of Scotland and founder of the clan Fergus[s]pn. His use of this elsewhere, in a letter to a friend, Mr. William Dick of London, is remarked by Grosart (Works, p. xxvii): "I am the son of the ancient, the royal Fergus." In 1774 a William Dick was banished from Edinburgh for fraud (Caledonian Mercury, 28 February 1774).
3. Courant, 5 January 1771. It was first under the command of Captain Glover and later under Captain Meadows.
4. Admiralty Commission and Warrant Books, 6/20, p. 284, Public Record Office.

30 March 1772).⁵ After an extended policing tour along the coasts of the southern Colonies in America, the Tartar was scheduled to return home. It must have been in May 1774, when the ship sailed from Virginia, that Hary dispatched his advertisement to herald his coming. But the troubles manifesting themselves in such things as tea parties compelled the Tartar to run to Boston harbor for blockade duty in the same month.⁶ She stayed there for at least several months.⁷ Hary's last letter, sent in May of the following year, was addressed from Halifax, where the ships were forced to go to take on supplies. The Muster Books of the Tartar show "Heny. Ferguson Discharged 12 Feb 1776 Unsble [unserviceable] Order Adm. Douglas," but the abbreviation "Unsble" obviously covered many reasons. The Weekly Magazine of 13 March 1777 reports his death in November 1776: "At St Jago de la Vega, Jamaica, Hary Ferguson, Esq..." What Hary was doing there is a matter

5. Admiralty List of Chaplains, Masters-at-Arms, and Schoolmasters 1757-1823, 6/185, Public Record Office.

6. Advertiser, 15 July 1774.

7. Courant, 5 October 1774, reports the Tartar at Boston. The communication was sent from Boston in August at the earliest.

9. Edinburgh Marriage Register. Margaret is recorded as living in the Old Kirk Parish, which means that the family was still in the house in Bell's Wynd.

1. Courant, 15 April 1781.

of conjecture.⁸

That auspicious month of July, which saw Robert's recovery and hopes of Hary's return, held yet another event for the Fergusson family. Margaret was married to Alexander Duvall on the third.⁹ Duvall, who kept a grocer's shop at the head of Covenant Close, later (November 1780) went bankrupt.¹ In late 1781 he entered the Navy as a purser.

8. A probability is that he joined an American privateer, since Royal Navy desertions to American ships from the time of the Revolution to the mid-19th century were very common (and a major cause of the War of 1812). In November 1776, H.M.S. Maidstone defeated marauding American privateers off Jamaica (Weekly Magazine, 13 March 1776). Might not Hary have been killed there? Grosart (Works, p. cx) claims "it is understood" that Hary opened a fencing school in Boston and that, while there, "he addressed a series of letters on the painfully celebrated 'Stamp Act,' to one of the Boston newspapers, in which, righteously enough certainly, he took part with the Americans." Grosart is guessing. A search of Boston periodicals (carried out for me by Miss Elizabeth Gillis) offers no substantiation.
9. Edinburgh Marriage Register. Margaret is recorded as living in the Old Kirk Parish, which means that the family was still in the house in Bell's Wynd.
1. Courant, 16 April 1781.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Up to the latest biography, all commentaries on Fergusson's mental disorder (with one exception) have been almost purely romantic. While it may be fascinating for some to live in a world where people can die of broken hearts and lose their wits through melancholy or disappointment, the evidence concerning Fergusson is too clear to escape or to overlook.

The one exception to the long run of fanciful diagnoses is to be found in one of the appendices to Sydney Goodsir Smith's Robert Fergusson 1750-1774 (pp. 199, 200), where Dr. Chalmers Davidson has contributed a reasonable opinion on Fergusson's medical and psychiatric history. It is Dr. Davidson's cautious conclusion, that the illness probably was manic-depression, which I will accept and amplify.¹

Before continuing, however, there are two false theories to be dismissed. The traditional conclusion has been that

1. I am also indebted to Sir David Henderson, Edinburgh University, for an independent study with similar and more detailed conclusions. Dr. Elizabeth Makkay of Boston, Massachusetts, has agreed to the manic-depression diagnosis.

2. Peter...

Fergusson lapsed into religious melancholy, but this conclusion is quickly disposed of in that such a condition is an illness of middle or old age, not of youth. The religious obsession was actually a manifestation of mental illness, not a disease in itself. The other theory is that of Matthew P. McDiarmid, who, in his otherwise careful study, states that Fergusson lost his mind and died as a result of deterioration caused by syphilis (p. 69). The basis of his theory lies in Peterkin, who stated his "decided purpose, to tell the truth, and all the truth...now for the first time brought into view..."² But the truth which he so ardently desired to tell is couched in rather vague and indirect terms, and the full extent of his boldness consists of two statements: that Fergusson "was under the influence of medicine, for his recovery from the consequences of ebriety and folly" and that he suffered an "unfortunate complaint." Since Peterkin purports to be stating a new truth, it is difficult to interpret his Bowdlerization to mean anything other than syphilis. And it must be admitted that if Fergusson never contracted a venereal disease in eighteenth century Edinburgh,

² Peterkin, p. 51.

treatment usually associated with the disease, he might almost be suspected of being an uncommon young man, which Fergusson himself admitted. But though its very prevalence made it less virulent in form, the general character of the disease was much as it is today. Between ten and twenty years is required to effect a deterioration, and that deterioration is then characterized by locomotor ataxia, a neurological atrophy which impairs the ability to co-ordinate body movements. For instance, the afflicted person is unable to put his hand on what his eye sees, and he will stumble in his walking. Even if Fergusson had contracted the disease at the age of fourteen, a particularly swift case of it would not have been apparent until he was twenty-four, and death would not follow for many years afterwards. None of his friends seemed to have observed the very obvious symptoms of advanced syphilis, and two doctors who visited him did not recognize them either. We can be sure that in 1773 and 1774 the poet was not taking medicine for the illness which drove him insane, as Peterkin and McDiarmid suggest. Syphilis as the cause of his madness and death is a medical impossibility.

If a person of his obviously idealistic nature, however, became syphilitic as the result of moral transgressions, we could expect strong psychological depression. The mercury

treatment usually prescribed would demand the temperance which Fergusson finally put into practice.

Manic-depression is not precipitated by any one experience. Fergusson's health, his general personality, and the influences in his life must be considered.

The poet came from a family the members of which had remarkably sound constitutions. The father and mother died at well beyond contemporary life expectancy. Though one child died in infancy, the others, with the exception of Robert, were reasonably healthy.³ From his earliest years he suffered illness. He probably missed a full year at the High School for health reasons, and when he made a trip to the North with his mother, his father was relieved to learn "that Rob has held out the journey." The exertions of the trek from Round Lichnot put him to bed, and about five years later he suffered a physical collapse in conjunction with his mental

3. Hary was robust and Barbara and Margaret inherited the family longevity, though they both lost a number of children in infancy. The Parochial Register of the Canongate records deaths of the Inverarity children as follows: David (aged one year) 1772; David (aged 10 months) 1778; and Harry (aged eight) 1783. The same Register lists also the deaths of William Duvall, who died in 1781 aged 17 months, and Robina Duvall (surely named for Robert), who died in 1783 at 20 months.

collapse. The effect of ill health on the mind can be grave. An unhealthy child in a family otherwise sound may suffer feelings of inferiority. Moreover, he may be pampered and thus turn to a reflective and introverted existence--though not necessarily a joyless one; this was the case with Robert, who was early given to reading, and whose condition endeared him to his mother. His later preoccupation with premature death was not so illogical in view of the hazards a frail person faced in an age when medical practitioners were little more than barely successful witch-doctors. Fergusson's stomach weakness may have been of a nervous nature, and then again it may have been an indication of a continuing organic disorder. It seems a paradox that he should like long--even rigorous--walking trips, but that may have been a compensatory reaction to a lack of bodily vigor.

The anecdotes, the testimony, and the poetry of Fergusson emphasize an approach to life which was outwardly gay and carefree to an excessive degree. I have already designated this approach as "manic." It may be argued that the evidence to authenticate the anecdotes and the testimony is weak, but it cannot be argued that the poet's demeanor was not such as they seem to have been. manic-depression.

to win him a large circle of friends, which included men more important than himself and men older than himself. To command the admiration of such a circle as his required a personal attractiveness, good-nature (and certainly seriousness, also). Beyond the accusations of dissipation, the negative side of his personality has been but vaguely exhibited. Forthright Philanthropus versified that he was haughty and unwilling to mend on good advice. Inverarity hesitantly admits the same thing:

The dignity of Fergusson's mind has ever reflected an honour on his memory which, though some may have endeavoured to lessen it by affixing the name of pride to an independent spirit rendered zealous of its rights by poverty and misfortune, none but Irving has attempted to efface it by the imputation of contrary qualities.⁴

In contrast to his carefree, yet self-confident and proud outlook, there were periods of despondency. In his last year the manic-depressive cycle was increasingly wheeling back again and again to these moods. He himself would be unable to realize the causes, for they were intimately

connected with his whole background and not any single fragment of it. His drinking is an indication of personal insecurity. All of these traits of personality, in that they seem to have been excessive in Fergusson, signify manic-depression.

4. Scots Magazine, November 1801.

It was natural that the main manifestation, or obsession, should have been religious depression, for religion pervaded the Fergusson family. Mrs. Fergusson was "a woman of great piety"; Hary was concerned with religious matters; and a description of Margaret in her later life leaves us feeling that she was a fanatic.⁵ Moreover, the atmosphere of Scotland was a compelling influence. The earliest incident of his life of which we know--"spare the rod"--rises from Fergusson's Bible reading. Anyone who reads, as did the poet, Anderson's Defence of the Church Government, will admit that a certain amount of dedication to religious study is required. Fergusson was sent to St. Andrews to study for the ministry, and he deserted that profession only when his father died. He deserted it because he held serious doubts and reservations about the doctrines of the Church of Scotland. This is hinted at in the underlinings he made in the copy of The Deist's Manual which he owned in 1767.⁶ What he chose to underline had to

5. Gray, James, ed., The Poems of Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1821), p. xiii: "Deep impressions of religion seem to have belonged to the family; for his sister Mrs Duval, a woman of superior intellect, was extremely eloquent upon that subject, using arguments when she encountered its foes, that 'tore the Sceptic's bays.'"

6. See Appendix M.

do with the rational proof of the existence and nature of God, and it would certainly be very odd for a complacent Presbyterian theological student to require proof based upon reason. He had discussed his doubts with his brother, who answered:

I was, like many, fond of the church of England's forms, &c. &c. but having been in a Romish church since, I find these forms are merely the --- of laziness, and differ but very little from one another...⁷

Was Robert contemplating joining the Church of England?

Lines in his poetry confirm that the rebellion and search lasted until the time of his dissolution. If he were to desert the Church of Scotland, which way could he turn to an alternative, more gentle orthodoxy? he wondered. In his final year he was stifled by feelings of guilt because he had not chosen. To his demented thinking, reparation was impossible, though, as we shall see, he still clung to a pathetic hope that he would be "a shining light." How unfortunate that religious doubt, which has elicited genius in other sensitive spirits, should have been the final torture of Fergusson's sick mind.

7. Campbell, p. 295. See Appendix H.

While all the meagre information available leads us to the conclusion that Fergusson's disease was manic-depression, aggravated and characterized by strong feelings of religious guilt, other possibilities do exist. For instance, the religious mania and guilt, the self-centered personality (especially as exhibited in Fergusson's ornate signature), his violent periods after his fall, and his delusions in the bedlam are connected with paranoia or schizophrenia (either of which, however, can exist in conjunction with manic-depression). But without full and accurate information, nothing seems more certain than the diagnosis already given.

The end moved on rapidly.

Though Fergusson's mother desired to keep him at home, it was impossible to do so.

His situation was humiliating to the pride of human genius. He lay stretched on a humble bed, surrounded with the appalling [*sic*] insignia of a lunatic asylum. The smile of complacency, and generosity, and worth, which was wont to animate his countenance, had given place to the haggard wildness of aspect which distinguishes the maniac. Fergusson... frequently sang with a pathos and tenderness of expression which he never surpassed in the happiest moments of his convivial brilliancy: in particular, he chaunted "The Birks of Invermay" with such exquisite melody, that those who heard his notes can never forget the sound.⁸

8. Peterkin, p. 58.

At length, Dr. Andrew Duncan, an eminent medical lecturer and probably a friend of the poet, was called.⁹

His description of his attendance on the poet is moving:

Soon after I settled as a Physician in Edinburgh, now near fifty years ago, I was requested to visit the late Mr Robert Ferguson, well known to his countrymen as a Scottish Poet of no mean abilities. I found him in a deplorable condition, subject to furious insanity. He lived in the house of his Mother, an old Widow, in very narrow circumstances. Her feeble and aged state, the situation of her dwelling-house, and several other circumstances, rendered it impossible to make any attempts toward his cure, with the slightest prospect of advantage while he remained at home. After several fruitless attempts to have him placed in a more desirable situation, he was at last removed to the Bedlam of the City of Edinburgh. There I also continued my visits to him, in conjunction with my late worthy friend Mr Alexander Wood, who had at that time the charge of the medical department of the Edinburgh Poorhouse, and of the Bedlam attached to it. Without a convalescence from his insanity, death soon put a period to poor Ferguson's existence.¹

9. Duncan had studied at St. Andrews and could have been acquainted with Fergusson through the St. Andrews University club in Edinburgh. He was a kind-hearted man, sincerely affected by the plight of lunatics in his time. Though Lord Cockburn in his Memorials makes light of him, he was a person of great ability, and his knowledge of the proper care of the insane was considerably advanced. It is said that it was his visit to Fergusson which first led him to that great passion of his life, the better treatment of lunatics. At the time of his visit, Duncan was giving independent medical lectures; later he gained a chair at the University.

1. Duncan, Andrew, Sr., A Letter to His Majesty's Sheriffs-Depute in Scotland recommending the establishment of four national asylums for the reception of criminal and pauper lunatics (Edinburgh 1818), pp. 4, 5.

Had it been financially possible to place Fergusson elsewhere, he might have recovered. But once within the horrible bounds of the Edinburgh bedlam, all the real skill and competence of Duncan and Wood--"Lang Sandy Wood," an Edinburgh character, but a capable practitioner--could not avail.

The manner of Fergusson's being conducted to the asylum was necessarily by means of a ruse. Several friends called upon him and, under the pretext that they were to visit a friend, put him in a sedan chair. One of the friends who accompanied him supplied John Pinkerton with an account of the sad business:

I was told by a person who was his most intimate friend, and who went to see him lodged there, as otherwise force alone could have carried him, that it was about nine o'clock at night when they went; and that the dismal habitation was quite silent: but upon Ferguson's entering the door he set up a strange halloo, which, in the instant, was repeated by the miserable inhabitants of all the cells in the house... Ferguson often exprest to this friend a presentiment, that he should sink into that uttermost calamity.²

Who was the friend who performed this heavy duty to Fergusson?

Obviously it was George Paton, who supplied Pinkerton with so

much information for the biographical sketches he included in

Ancient Scottish Poems. Possibly David Herd went along with

2. [Pinkerton, John], Ancient Scottish Poems, v. I, pp. cxl, cxli.

him, too.³

The place to which Fergusson went was grim beyond imagination, but it was certainly no better and no worse than other bedlams of the time. He was put into a cell on the stone floor of which was a straw mat for him to sleep on. There were twenty-one other cells in that building, which lay to the south of the Charity Workhouse,⁴ located on what is modern day Bristo Street. In this unsanitary and disease-ridden institution, the inhabitants were fed mainly on porridge, broth, and sometimes on condemned meat,⁵ and they died, healthy and unhealthy alike and at all ages, at the rate of ten per cent per annum.⁶ It is hardly a tribute

of these detailed descriptions may, of course, be called

3. Andrew Plummer, in a letter to Herd dated 13 January 1793 (National Library MS. 692, leaf 26) suspected it: "P. S. Was you the friend that Pinkerton says accompanied Poor Ferguson to Bedlam? It must have been a most shocking melancholy Scene." But Pinkerton's informant could not have been Herd, for when Paton suggested that the two correspond on literary matters, Pinkerton indignantly refused (The Literary Correspondence of John Pinkerton, London 1830, v. 1, p. 186).

4. This should not be confused with Darien House, which was located elsewhere.

5. Courant, 14 March 1767.

6. Arnot, p. 559. The average death rate of Edinburgh at the same period was about one and one-half per cent: for 1777, there were recorded 960 deaths in a total population of over 85,000; in the Charity Workhouse there were 61 deaths among the 664 inhabitants.

7. James Forrest, Clerk to the hospital?

to that great age of sentimentality that the earnest and dedicated Andrew Duncan was obliged to fight his whole lifetime to have the "cells" replaced with a better structure elsewhere--the real monument to Robert Fergusson in his native city.

It is only in these last two months or more of his life that the picture of Fergusson really becomes personal. Why so many of the serious and brighter moments should have been allowed to perish is not fully understandable. Human interests are naturally attracted to the pathetic turns of life, but it may be an implication of how profoundly the tragedy of the poet touched those around him. The accuracy of these detailed descriptions may, of course, be called into question, but they are nevertheless worth repeating.

Sommers learned of Fergusson's first night and day in his cell from the keeper, Forrest:⁷

During the first night of his confinement, he slept none; and when the keeper visited him in the morning, he found him walking along the stone floor of his cell with his arms folded, and in sullen sadness uttering not a word. After some minutes silence, he clapped his right hand on his forehead, and complained much of pain. He asked the keeper who brought him there? He answered, friends;--"Yes, friends, indeed," replied Robert, "they think I am too

8. Sommers, pp. 30-32.

9. Irving, p. 15.

7. James Forrest, Clerk to the hospital?

wicked to live, but you will soon see me a shining and a burning light." You have been so already, observed the keeper. "You mistake me," said the poet; "I mean, you shall see, and hear of me as a bright minister of the gospel!" I shall be happy to see that day indeed, replied Forrest; but in the mean time, I have brought you a refreshment-- (presenting him with a dish of porridge). "Set them down," said Fergusson, "and when I am disposed to eat, I will take them; but I will thank you if you will give me a glass of whiskey, for I am very cold." The keeper told him, that was a favour he could not grant. Forrest ~~was~~ suddenly called for; he locked the door of the cell, and retired. In the afternoon, his mother and elder sister called upon him, found him in a state of composure, and conversed with him for a considerable time; but with difficulty the captive allowed them to depart.⁸

He imagined, Irving says, that he was a king, "and adorned his head with a crown of straw, which he plaited very neatly with his own hands."⁹ If we may believe the story of another biographer, James Gray, Fergusson was writing in the moonlight one night when some clouds shadowed his paper. Looking upwards, he demanded, "Great Jupiter, snuff the moon!" And when a dark cloud actually had passed to obscure it entirely, he arose and shouted, "Thou stupid god, thou hast snuffed it out." Gray remarks that, though he had the tale on good authority, it is curiously like another one concerning Nathaniel Lee. "...whether it could be a coincidence of thought, or the

8. Sommers, pp. 30-32.

9. Irving, p. 15.

1. Gray, p. 15.

recollection of it floating in Fergusson's mind, even in his deranged state" he did not know.¹

Friends visited Fergusson, and Sommers was one of them. He brought with him Dr. John Aitkin who, like Duncan, was an advocate of hospital reform.

Day after day, I inquired for him of his mother, and younger sister, but never had resolution to pay him a personal visit. After, however, nearly two months had elapsed, I was surprised at hearing of his being still in his captive state, and therefore was determined to give him a call, but found that it was necessary to obtain for that purpose an order in writing from the sitting magistrate. In my way to the Council Chamber, to procure the order, I met with Dr. John Aitkin, late physician here; I told him where I was going, and for what purpose. He expressed a wish to accompany me, as he knew the poet well. Both our names were inserted in the Magistrate's mandate of admission, with a promise on the part of the Doctor to report to the Magistrate the state of the poet. We got immediate access to the cell, and found Robert lying with his clothes on, stretched upon a bed of loose uncovered straw. The moment he heard my voice, he instantly arose--got me in his arms and wept! The Doctor felt his pulse, and declared it to be favourable. I asked the keeper (whom I formerly knew as a gardener) to allow him to accompany us into an adjoining back court, by way of taking the air. He consented. Robert took hold of me by the arm, placing me on his right, and the Doctor on his left, and in this form we walked backward and forward along the court, conversing for nearly an hour. In the course of which, many questions were asked at him both by the Doctor and myself, to which he returned most satisfactory answers; but he seemed very anxious to obtain his liberty. The sky was lowering, the sun being much obscured; led by curiosity, and knowing his natural quickness, I asked him what hour of the day it might be? He stopped, and looking up, with his face towards the south, while his

1. Gray, Poems, p. xiv.

hands were clasped; paused a little, and said, it was within five minutes of twelve. The Doctor looked [at] his watch, and exclaimed, "It is just six minutes from twelve!" Upon our returning into the house, and before re-entering the cell, I asked the keeper if he would allow us to give the poet a glass of ale or spirits. The former he said we might give him, but the latter was prohibited. This prohibition, the Doctor observed, was right; but added, that if he would permit us to enter an apartment of his (the keeper's) house, a glass or two of ale would revive our friend. This he reluctantly complied with. One bottle of ale only, with rolls and cheese were brought forward. Robert partook of them heartily, and declared himself wonderfully refreshed.

Having passed about two hours with him on this visit, we found it necessary to take our leave, the doctor assuring him, that he would soon be restored to his friends, and that I would visit him again in a day or two. He calmly and without a murmur, walked with us to the cell, and upon parting, reminded the doctor to get him soon at liberty, and of mine to see him next day. Neither of us, however, had an opportunity of accomplishing our promise...²

However well Sommers delineates his visit, his single appearance does not convince us of the close friendship with the poet which he claims.

Mrs. Inverarity told Campbell of her last visit to her brother:

A few days previous to his dissolution, his mother, and sister (my informant) were admitted into his cell, where he lay on his bed of straw, calm, and seemingly collected. The evening was chill and damp; he requested his mother to gather the bed-cloaths about him, and sit on his feet, for he complained much of their being cold, and insensible to the touch, she did so, and his sister sat by his bed-side; he looked wishfully

2. Sommers, pp. 32-36.

into his mother's face, and said, "O mother, this is kind indeed;" then turning to his sister, "Might you not frequently come, and sit by me thus?--you cannot imagine how comfortable it would be--you might fetch your seam, and sew beside me;" to this, no answer was returned; an interval of silence was filled up with sobs and tears, "What ails ye?--wherefore sorrow for me, sirs?--I am very well cared for here--I do assure I want for nothing--but it is cold--it is very cold--you know I told you it would come to this at last--yes, I told you so--O do not go yet--mother! I hope to be soon--O do not go yet--do not leave me. The keeper approaches, and whispers them, "It is time to depart." This was the last time our poet, his mother, and sister saw each other.³

his Fergusson died alone on 17 October 1774. In the minute book of the Charity Workhouse, now lost, his death was recorded on the following day: "Mr Ferguson, in the Cels."⁴ The

3. Campbell, p. 297. Sydney Goodsir Smith has pointed out the "Shakespearean echo" of "Wherefore sorrow for me, sirs?" It is not difficult to suspect Campbell of literary improvement on Fergusson's last known words.
4. This was quoted by Mitchell, [Sir] Arthur, Memorandum...on the Position of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum for the Insane (Edinburgh 1883). Mitchell said that the death was reported in a minute of 18 October. But an examination of the extant Sederunt Books shows that it was not the practice to insert deaths in the minutes. In a death record which does survive, the exact date of death is stated. It is therefore my assumption that Fergusson died on the night of 17-18 October and his decease was reported on the 18th, the exact date of its occurrence being unknown. Peterkin says that he expired "amid the terrors of the night," but Campbell, on the other hand, reports that Mrs. Fergusson was given the news "on the evening of the 16th..." Peterkin's statement is the more credible. The Courant (19 October 1774) indicates the 17th: "Monday last [17 October] died here, Mr Robert Ferguson [*sic*], well known in this city for his poetical talents."

7. At Tolbooth St. John's Church, Edinburgh.

specific cause of his death is not easily fathomed. He had lived, in his weakened physical state, for two months in temperatures averaging fifty degrees.⁵ Paton wrote that he "was carried off by a Fever."

On 19 October 1774 a group of friends gathered at the gate of the bedlam and accompanied Robert Fergusson's body to a handsome settlement for him in India, and that he should the Canongate Churchyard. He was buried in the plot where his father had been interred and where his mother was to follow him in 1787.⁶ The two documents relating to the burial bear a stark pathos: "Ferguson 19 [October 1774] Robert Ferguson writer in Edinburgh outside Hays Bur place 24 years" appears in the Parochial Register of the Canongate; the Kirk Treasurer's Accounts⁷ record the turf payment paid, as ordered, on the date of burial: "[October] 19 to [cash]-- For Robt Ferguson--6[s]--." Some years later, Robert Burns placed a monument on the grave.

There was yet a doubly ironic epilogue. Hary had sent a remittance to his mother to enable her to afford better care for his brother. While she was making suitable preparations,

8. Campbell, p. 297.

5. Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (Edinburgh MDCCCXCVIII), v. VXXIX, pt. 1.

6. Parochial Registers, Co. of Edinburgh, Canongate 1770-1793: "Forbes 15 [August 1787] Elizth relict of Wm Ferguson E: of Hay 73 years Decay" [.] as printed by Gressant (Robert).

7. At Tolbooth St. John's Church, Edinburgh.

the word of Robert's death was brought to her.⁸ And above a year later, a person identified simply as "Mr. Burnet,"⁹ extended a generous, if belated, offer:

We are well informed that a young gentleman, who has been for some time in the East-Indies, and who was an intimate companion of the late ingenious Mr Robert Fergusson, has wrote his mother [i.e., Mrs. Burnet] in this city, desiring her to acquaint Mr Fergusson that he has procured a handsome settlement for him in India, and that he should repair thither with all expedition; at the same time requesting her to provide him with all necessaries fit for the voyage, and to equip him in a genteel manner--But, alas! Fortune play'd the truant; and before the grass grew, &c.¹

Did this offer come from Fergusson's schoolmate, Archibald Burnet? He was in the East India Company until the 90's, according to Andrew Duncan's Elogiorum Sepulchralium Edinensium Delectus (Edinburgh 1815).² The poet had never experienced such open-heartedness when he was the laureate of his city.

* * *

8. Campbell, p. 297.

9. Irving, p. 12.

1. Weekly Magazine, 11 April 1776.

2. But the Commonwealth Relations Office can locate no record of his service nor do they have the record of money being sent by one John Burnett, as printed by Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 130).

excesses. He had an understandable lack of moral responsibility to himself.

All we have of those twenty-four years of life and genius is a comparatively small body of poetry and facts, external facts which leave us little upon which to base an appraisal of the character of Robert Fergusson. In order to explain his triumph and his tragedy, it is necessary to regard him both as a very young person and as a man of genius.

The testimony of those who knew him affords us very conflicting impressions. Peter Stuart wrote that he had a magical, almost hypnotic personality. Others spoke of his outstanding convivial qualities. He was socially brilliant and his friendships were catholic; artists, scholars, poets, tradesmen were his fellows. He did not fail to impress them all, and they felt an impact which lasted not only for the moment of meeting, but for years after his death. These abilities bespeak something more than adaptation, the mere suiting of himself to his company. The anecdotes which are told of him are evidence of his liveliness, talent, and sharpness. But this social brilliance was also fraught with the inadequacies of youth. Philanthropus gives us the honest picture of Fergusson's heedless adolescence, his excessive interest in himself: but is humility the virtue of a twenty-year-old who has suddenly attained fame? How quickly and how easily did some of his comrades draw him to deleterious

excesses. He had an understandable lack of moral responsibility to himself.

Many aspects of Robert Fergusson's life betray the insecurities which tortured him. His drinking was excessive and quite obviously approached the beginning stages of alcoholism. But his ruination lay not in his drinking: that was only a manifestation of a process which had commenced long before. He was a sensitive person, intensely preoccupied with himself. It was perhaps natural that one so young, so precocious, and so gifted should direct so much of his thinking inward; it may have been a token of creative genius. But the proportions which this preoccupation assumed were so great that Fergusson was unable to find a solution to the difficulties which ensued. We see in him a person who, with a mind far above the average, could not solve his basic problems. His decision to restrain his appetites came much too late; it came at a time when the ravages of intemperate living had already wracked his frail constitution and left their scars upon his mind. He was unable to control the periods of despondency which followed, just as he had been unable to moderate his social inclinations. He could not reconcile his beliefs and his actions to his early religious upbringing. His sight was so short that he could not realize that it was

hopeless for him to expect immediately the wider success he desired as a poet. His madness comes as final evidence of that dichotomy of genius and adolescence: the problems which tormented him were those of an intelligent and sensitive being, but he could not approach them with any degree of maturity.

The following documents are from The Commissariat Record of Aberdeen, Register of Testaments 1719-1800, at the Register House, Edinburgh.

20 January 1747 Inventory Henry Ferguson late Dyster at

Beyond the inadequacies and tragedy of Robert Fergusson's life glows his real achievement, though that, too, is tragic in that his full potentialities were never realized. He was the real poet of a renaissance, reviving in Scottish poetry qualities which the centuries had almost quelled, and his death left the revival still embryonic. His stature should not be underestimated: to consider him merely as an influence on an immediate successor is to ignore his true sense of artistry and to overlook the resuscitation of an ancient tradition, a process continuing in our own day. He made all of his successors aware of the artistic creation yet possible in their literary heritage, and he stands in relation to his predecessors, the makars, as one of their line.

of the sum of the several sums of money above written since the same fell respectively due, whereunto the said Francis Farquharson Extra Creditor foresaid hath right from the said William Ferguson by assignation dated the twelfth second of November Seventeen hundred and forty four Under

protestation that the said Francis Farquarson be
 preferable to all the APPENDIX A her creditors upon the
 inventory underwritten for payment of the sum of money
 prinle @ rents and penalty above written, and that he have
 retention and allowance of the Expence of this present
 Confirmation and Grants of Executry charges and Expences
 he has been put to or may be put to in going about the
 said office any manner of way.

The following documents are from The Commissariat Record
 In Finnis the said Francis Farquarson Exetr. Creditor foresaid
of Aberdeen, Register of Testaments 1715-1800, at the Register
 resting and owing to the said defunct the time of his decease
 House, Edinburgh. of Nine hunder and forty five pound scots

money prinle and @ rent thereof from Martinmas Seventeen
 hund 20 January 1747 Inventory Henry Ferguson late Dyster at
 of Auchindore Ext. and seven hundred and thirtie two years

drawn Inventory of the goods geer and debts which pertain'd and
 Abir were resting and owing to the deceast Henry Ferguson some-
 and time Litster in Tarland thereafter in Achindore who died
 the in the month of one thousand seven hundred and forty
 hund years given up by Francis Farquarson of Finzion
 the Executor Creditor desern'd to the said defunct conform to
 of a Decreet of Exectry pronounc'd thereanent of date the
 eight day of January instant For payment to the said Francis
 Farquarson of the sum of Sixty merks scots money yet remain-
 ing due of the sum of three hundred and sixty merks money
 foresaid which the said defunct by his bond of provision
 of date the eleventh of November Seventeen hunder and thirtie
 of seven became bound to pay to William Ferguson his son at the
 the term of Whitesunday one thousand and seven hunder and forty
 to years Item of the sum of one hundred and Eighty merks qch.
 the the said defunct became bound to pay to his said son at White-
 Kenn Sunday Seventeen hundred and forty one by the said bond
 cont with the usual penaltys affecting the said two prinle sums
 to As also for payt. to the said Francis Farquarson of the sum
 the of one thousand merks money foresaid of prinle two hunder
 Caut merks money above written of liquidate Expenses incurred
 through failzie which the defunct becam bound to pay to
 his said son by the bond of provision above mention'd at the
 first term of Whitesunday or Martinmas after his death And
 of the @ rent of the severall sums of money above written
 Patr since the same fell respectively due, whereunto the said
 Exco Francis Farquarson Exetr Creditor foresaid hath right from
 Gree the said William Ferguson by assignation dated the twentie
 pass second of November Seventeen hundred and forty four Under

protestation that the said Francis Farquarson be preferable to all the defuncts other creditors upon the inventory underwritten for payment of the sums of money prinle @ rents and penalty abovementioned, and that he have retention and allowance of the Expence of this present Confirmation and of all the other charges and Expences he has been put to or may be put to in going about the said office any manner of way.

In Primis the said Francis Farquarson Exetr. Creditor foresaid gives up grants and confesses that there pertain'd and were resting and owing to the said defunct the time of his decease foresaid the sum of Nine hunder and forty five pound scots money prinle and @ rent thereof from Martinmas Seventeen hundred and forty three contain'd in a bill dated the second of Decembr. one thousand seven hundred and thirtie two years drawn by the defunct upon and accepted by Peter Gordon of Abirgeldy payable the eleventh of Novembr: Seventeen hunder and thirtie three upon the back of which bill is marked all the @ rents to be paid to the said term of Martinmas Seventeen hundred and forty two And by a discharge produced by Abergeldy the @ rents appear to have been paid to the defunct to the term of Martinmas Seventeen hundred and forty three.

At Aberdeen the twentie eight day of January one thousand seven hundred and forty seven years In Presence of Patrick Duff of Kemnay Esqr. Commessary of Abdn.

The Commessary foresaid confirms the said Francis Farquarson of Finzion Exetr. Creditor to the said Henry Ferguson conform to the Decreet of Exetry. above specified for payment and satisfaction to him pro tanto of the sums of money contained in the title of the Inventory and receiv'd Mr. Francis Downie at Whitehouse of Kemnay Cautioner for the said Executor that the sums of money containd in the foregoing Inventory shall be made furthcoming to all parties having interest therein as accords in the Law and the said Executor obliges himself to active his Cautioner of his Cautionry above written and of all that may follow thereon Frans Farqrsn
 20th 12 Court
 Franc: Downey
 Witness
 Patt. Duff

Patrick Duff of Kemnay Esq. Commesar of Abd. To
 Executors hereof conjunctly and severally specially constitute
 Greeting, We charge you incontinent this our precept seen ye
 pass to the parish of Auchindore at at [sic] the most patent

door thereof upon a sunday before noon, immediately after
divine service, in presence of the peritioners conven'd
for the time, lawfully summons warn & charge The Relick
and children of the deceist Henry Fergusson sometime litster
in Tarland thereafter in Auchindore
And all and Sundry others having or pretending to have interest
to compear before us or our Deputes in a Commesary court of
Abd, to be holden within the consistory place thereof upon
the Eight day of January next to come, there to hear and see
Executors testamentary (if any be) and failing thereof Datives
lawfully given and confirm'd, in and to all and whole & owing
to the said Defunct, the time of his decease, with Farqrsen
of Finzean Executor Creditor thereto--
Executor Dative thereto Or else to alledge &c. The which
to do &c. Given at Abd. the fifteenth day of November 1746
years
Alexr. Innes.

8 January 1747 pntia Duff

The Commissary Decerns Francis Farquharson of Finzean Exer
Creditor to the Defunct for payment and satisfaction to him
of the Sum of money contained in the title of the Inventory Patt. Duff.

Upon the twentie first day of December one thousand seven hundred & forty six years, the said day being Sunday I, Alexr. Walker, Executor hereof past by Virtue of the within written Edict, to the parish kirk of Achindore and at the most patent door thereof immediately after divine service, in presence of the peritioners convey'd for the time lawfully summon'd warn'd and charg'd, the whole persons within named or desinged [designed], and all and sundry others having or pretending to have interest to compear day place and to the effect within specified and made certification as is within exprest, This I did by open proclamation in reading the within written Edict, at the said Kirk door, and to the effect none might pretend ignorance of the premises, by leaving and affixing thereon a just Copy of the said Edict in presence of Alexr. Walker Junior in Gateside and Charles Morison in Deskie Witnesses then present hereto with me subscribing Alexander Walker Junr. witness Alexander Walker Charles Morison Witness:

APPENDIX B

Letter of Walter Morison to John Forbes

The following document, inconn Deskford, December 7th, 1754.

I Dear Sir, unable, however, to trace the original; the facsimile

signature I wrote you in my last concerning the application, he (a friend of Mr. Morison's) wants to Lord Deskford: as I told you my difficulties, so within a few days ago, I was in company with a gentleman who told me that his Lordship had undertaken fully as much as he could make out, and anoyther mentioned a case that confirmed that, for Lady Mary had been addressed in favour of a gentlewoman of this country, living at Edinburgh with her husband in great straits, that her Ladyship would speak to her Lord, she answered that she was very sorry she could do nothing presently, for L[ord] D[eskford] could not get done for severalls [what] he had on hand, and suggested that that gentlewoman should apply to some oythers. Therefor I have written Mr. Fergusson yt it seems needless to write just now, but to refer [defer?] till his Lordship comes to the countrey.

Edinburgh 9th. I am, Dr. Sir,
Your obedt. and faithfull Servt.,
Walt. Morison.¹
Will: Fergusson²

¹ Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 35.

1. Grosart, Works, p. xxxiii. Library. Dr. James Walker was a Fellow of the College of Physicians in Edinburgh. In recognition of his "Jesuit Drops," a medicine allegedly effective for gallstones, skin disorders, "gleets," venereal disease, etc., he was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in London (Calcedonian Mercury, 3 January 1766).

APPENDIX C

Documents Written by William Fergusson

The following document, incomplete, is given by Grosart.

I have been unable, however, to trace the original; the facsimile signature which Grosart reproduces from it is authentically that of William Fergusson.

In Witness whereof WE have subscribed these Presents
Written by William Fergusson Writer in Edinburgh At Edinburgh
the Fifth day of March Seventeen hundred and Sixty three
Years. In presence of these Witnesses Mr. Anthony Fergusson
Merchant in Edinburgh and the said William Fergusson. Wa:
Ferguson. Jas. Walker.

Anthony Ferguson	Witness.
Will: Fergusson	Witness. ¹

Edinburgh 9th. February 1767 Borrowed up by me as Factor for
Dr. James Walker now of Lincolns Inn fields London Original
Tack, between the said Dr James Walker therein designd Physician
in Edinburgh and George McNaughtan, of a House and Garden in
New haven, which I oblige myself to return on demand or incase
of a necessity for registering the same an Authentic Extract.

Will: Fergusson²

1. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, p. 36.

2. MS. 1925, item 101, National Library. Dr. James Walker was a Fellow of the College of Physicians in Edinburgh. In recognition of his "Jesuit Drops," a medicine allegedly effective for gallstones, skin disorders, "gleets," venereal disease, etc., he was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in London (Caledonian Mercury, 3 January 1766).

APPENDIX D

Summation of the Fergusson Bursary

Ferguson Mortification 1695

Mr. David Ferguson Minister of Strathmartine by his Deed of Mortification Decbr 20th 1698 did mortify & dispose 6000 Marks Scots contained in a Bond granted by the Magistrates and Council of Dundee for maintaining and educating two poor young Male Children, not under the age of nine years at their admission, or above 14 years while at the Grammar School of Dundee; and when they should be 14 years compleat, if the Patrons should find them capable & inclined to be Scholars they were to be put to St. Leonards College for four years. The Patrons are the Provost of Dundee, David Graham of Fintree, Sir James Kinlock of that Ilk, Mr. Alexander Graham of Kincaldrum, and their Heirs, and Successors.¹

years of age, and were to be educated at the Grammar School of Dundee: the said Deed was signed by Peter Murray with whom it is deposited and by [Fergusson] signifying his inclination to reduce his said learning and go to the College of St. Andrews. The Deed was presented to the said Patrick Murray, he signified the said Deed to his intention and to provide from the Provost of Dundee, a certificate of his capacity for being put to the College, upon which they would present his admission.

II.

Present, John Lindsay of Dundee,

James Kinlock of that Ilk,

Compeared William Fergusson, Minister at Strathmartine, who presented to the Patrons proper certificates of his son Robert Fergusson's being properly qualified for going to the College. The Patrons did therefore by minute letter of this date present the said Robert Fergusson to the United College of St. Leonards and St. Salvator at St. Andrews, for the time limited by the said Deed, from and after the first day of November next, with an allowance of

1. From a manuscript book of David Gregory in which are listed the bursaries available at St. Andrews. This book is in the St. Andrews Library.

1. Grosart, Works, pp. xli, xlii.

2. Missive letter and a letter of William Fergusson to Mr. Edmonstone, Clerk to the University of St. Andrews:

APPENDIX E

To the Principal and Masters of the

United Colleges of St. Leonard and St. Andrews.

Letters and Papers Relating to Fergusson's

Entry to St. Andrews University

Gentlemen,—As there is now a vacancy in the mortification of the deceased Mr David Ferguson, sometime Minister of the Gospel at Strathmartine, of which we are a quorum of the Patrons; and

1. Abstracts from the Minute Book of the Fergusson Mortification Trust:

Perge, writer in Edinburgh, is a person duly qualified as an object of that donation; therefore we hereby present him, and

- I. Sederunt of the Patrons att Dundee this sixth day of December one thousand, seven hundred and sixty-four years.

Gentlemen, your John Barclay, Esq., Provost of Dundee, and James Graham, Esq., of Metthie.

Mr. Graham represented that Robert Fergusson, son of William Fergusson, Writer in Edinburgh, one of the boys upon the mortification, was at Martinmas last [November 1764], fourteen years of age, and consequently could be no longer at the Grammar School of Dundee: and having sent for the boy, and Peter Murray with whom he is boarded; and he [Fergusson] signifying his inclination to follow out his learning and go to the Colledge of St. Andrews. The Patrons recommended to the said Patrick Murray, to acquaint the boy's father of his intention and to procure from the Presbitry of Dundee, a certificate of his capacity for being put to the Colledge; upon which they would present him accordingly.

are II. Dundee, 7th December.

Present, John Barclay of Dundee,)
James Graham of Metthie.) Patrons.

Compeared William Fergusson, Writer in Edinburgh, who produced to the Patrons proper certificates of his son Robert Fergusson's being properly qualified for going to the Colledge: The Patrons did therefore by missive letter of this date present the said Robert Fergusson to the United Colledges of St. Leonards and St. Salvator at St. Andrews, per the time limited by the mortification, from and after the first day of November last, with an allowance of ten pounds sterling yearly, payable at Whitsunday and Martimas by equal portions, commencing the first terms payment at Whitsunday next.

Andrews burseries written [Signed] M'Cosh. James Graham,
Jas. Barclay. [sic]¹

1. Grosart, Works, pp. xli, xlii.

2. Missive letter and a letter of William Fergusson to Mr. Edmonstone, Clerk to the University of St. Andrews:

To the Principal and Masters of the United Colleges of St Salvator and St Leonard in the University of St Andrews.

Gentlemen,--As there is now a vacancy in the Mortification of the deceast Mr David Ferguson, sometime Minister of the Gospel at Strathmartine, of which we are a quorum of the Patrons; and as we understand the bearer, Robert Ferguson, son of William Ferguson, writer in Edinbr., is a person duly qualified as an object of that donation; therefore we hereby present him, and recommend him to your care; and we by this entitle him to ten pounds sterling yearly for the time limited by the Mortification, commencing the first of November last.--We are with esteem, Gentlemen, your most obedt. humble servants,

James Graham.

Jn. Barclay. [sic]

P. S.--The ten pounds to be paid at two terms in the year, Whitsunday and Martinmas, by equal portions, commencing the payment of the first half at Whitsunday next, when the money may be drawn for on Mr Graham.

Dundee, 7 Decem. 1764.²

[The following letter is described by the transcriber as "written in a strong, distinct, clerk-like hand, and some of the details are curious."]

Sir,--I hereby take the liberty to annex a copy state of the Fergusson's Mortification at Dundee as at Candlemas 1762, in right whereof my son Robert was presented to a bursary at your College of 7th December last for four years, at ten pounds sterling yearly, in consequence whereof he was admitted, and the presentation lodged with yourself the 8th of said month. Which copy state, if the same may be done with propriety, you will please be so good as lay before the Principal and Professors

1. Ibid.

4. Minutes, 23 January 1765.

2. Dundee Warder, and Arbroath and Forfar Journal, 28 December 1841. These letters appear in an article concerning St. Andrews bursaries written by James M'Cosh, the editor.

of the University, together with the Patron's Presentation, in order to draw upon James Graham of Meathie, Esq., who has the management of the funds, for ten pounds sterling, in terms of said presentation, and which I beg you will be so good as negotiat; out of which sum you will please pay Messrs Wilson and Morton's Fees, at three half guineas each, Mrs Gibson for the boy's board, at the rate of £35 Scots per quarter from 9th December last to the end of the session, together with any other dues that are usuall not already paid.

I observed that it was proposed to pay £5 at Whitsunday and Martinmas yearly, but as that is a postscript, and no part of the signed deed, and that from the situation the fund appears to be in at present, there is no necessity to divide it, it is hoped that Mr Graham, upon being advised that the whole must be had at this term, he will pay the drat. [draft]; and the truth is, at present I am not in circumstances to make any other shift. Your compliance will be an indelible obligation, besides whatever gratification you think proper to charge for your trouble shall be approven of, and your answer, if possible before the breaking up of the session, will be esteemed a singular favour.--I am, Sir, Your most obedient humble Servant,

Will. Fergusson

Warriston's Close, Edinburgh.
4th May, 1765.³

3. Abstracts from the Minutes of the United Colleges:

Allow'd the Clerk to give out an Extract of Robt Ferguson's Admission, he being received as a Ferguson Bursar upon a Letter from the patron's of Mr. Ferguson's Mortification.⁴

There was read a Letter from Mr Walter Ferguson Writer in Edinr desiring the principal to send him the Decreet that was obtain'd some years ago by St Leonards College against the Town of Dundee concerning the Ferguson Bursary. Which Decreet was taken out of the Cabinet & put into the principals hand to be sent to Mr Ferguson foresaid.⁵

3. Ibid.

4. Minutes, 23 January 1765.

5. 23 August 1765. I am indebted to Mr. Ronald P. Doig of St. Andrews University for copying out these extracts.

1. Letter to James Wilson

APPENDIX F

Letters of Nicholas Vilant1. St Andrew's, January 29. 1801.

The university of St Andrew's keep no record of the censures inflicted upon young men during the course of their studies, because they are willing to hope, that future good behaviour will atone for the improprieties of early days. But as an inquiry has been made on the part of the relations of Mr Robert Fergusson, whether he was expelled from this university, Mr Nicholas Vilant, professor of mathematics, the only person now in the university who was then a member of it, declares, for their satisfaction, that in the year 1767, as he recollects, at the first institution of the prizes given by the Earl of Kinnoul, late chancellor of this university, there was a meeting one night after the determination of the prizes for that year, of the winners in one room of the United College, and a meeting of the losers in another room at a small distance; that in consequence of some communications between the winners and the losers, a scuffle arose, which was reported to the masters of the College, and that Robert Fergusson and some others who had appeared the most active were expelled; but that the next day, or the day thereafter, they were all received back into the College upon promises of good behaviour for the future.

Nicolas Vilant.

This account of Fergusson's expulsion from the university was written by Dr Hill, Professor Vilant being unable from sickness to do more than attest it with his name.¹

2.

A youthful frolicsome exhibition (Professor Vilant writes in allusion to the above report) of your uncle (Fergusson), first directed Dr Wilkie's attention to him, and he afterwards

2. Scots Magazine, November 1801.

1. Letter to James Inverarity, Scots Magazine, October 1801.

employed him one summer, and part of another, if I rightly remember, in transcribing a fair copy of his academical lectures. The anecdote here alluded to, I may hereafter communicate to you, if I shall be able, being at present in so distressful, and weakly a state of body, as to be unable to read or write, without bringing on a severe feverish paroxysm.²

Occasioned by Dr. Hill's prescribing a tea spoon-ful of every medicine to every patient indiscriminately.

Happy tea spoon, which can hit
 Dr. Hill's unequal'd wit!
 Patients young, and patients old,
 Patients hot, and patients cold,
 Patients tender, patients tough,
 A tea spoon-ful is just enough.
 If with tea you shake your freeze,
 Or with drams your head inflame,
 Or with beef your paunch o'er-stuff,
 A tea spoon-ful is just enough.
 If in court, with brief in hand,
 Or at bar you trembling stand,
 Take the dose, fear no rebuff,
 A tea spoon-ful is just enough.
 What is stranger still than all,
 Be the tea spoon large or small,
 Be it batter'd, broken, rough,
 Still a tea spoon's just enough.
 Order drops, ye medic dunces,
 Order scruples, drachmas, and ounces,
 Hill asserts, and stands it bluff,
 That a tea spoon's just enough.
 Happy tea spoon, thus to hit
 Dr. Hill's unequal'd wit!¹

2. Scots Magazine, November 1801.

APPENDIX G

The Tea Spoon

Occasioned by Dr. Hill's prescribing a tea spoon-ful of every medicine to every patient indiscriminately.

I read with attention the Burial-letter you versified
and your poetic Happy tea spoon, which can hit:¹ the former
I approve of; Dr. Hill's unequal'd wit!tter in point of
rhyme. You'll Patients young, and patients old, fifth, and
the second and Patients hot, and patients cold, the like kind,
such as Habbie Patients tender, patients tough, her.
At first A tea spoon-full is just enough. one spoke of
entering at a If with tea you shake your frame, but now I
see the contrari Or with drams your head inflame, only to tantalize
me: for ever Or with beef your paunch o'er-stuff, at here,
the Edinburgh A tea spoon-full is just enough. lions, and among
the rest, flat If in court, with brief in hand,
I have only Or at bar you trembling stand, here. God grant
they may not Take the dose, fear no rebuff, bid me out of
21. 2s. for in A tea spoon-full is just enough. ot. Although
he has done me What is stranger still than all, for him in the
manner Paul, Be the tea spoon large or small, xander the
copper-smith. Be it batter'd, broken, rough,
Still a tea spoon's just enough.
Order drops, ye medic dunces,
Order scruples, drachms, and ounces,
[To Mrs. Ferguson] Hill asserts, and stands it bluff,
That a tea spoon's just enough.
Happy tea spoon, thus to hitoad, 11th May, 1768.
Dr. Hill's unequal'd wit!¹

D[ea]r Mother,

After an agreeable passage, I arrived here on
Wednesday last, having not been in the least sea-sick. I was

1. James Wilson. He went by the name of "Claudero" and wrote several small volumes of semi-humorous and smutty poetry which were published in Edinburgh in the 60's and 70's.
1. Advertiser, 17-21 November 1769. a school in November 1767, and here he refers to persons who had promised to patronize him.
3. Grosart (Works, pp. lix, lx) quotes the first paragraph. The whole is quoted by Irving (pp. 22, 23), but Grosart's partial quotation seems to be more exact, so that has been used. From a subsequent mention of the "New Theatre" in an unprinted part of the letter, it can be dated April 1765 (McDiarmid, p. 93).

APPENDIX H

Letters of Hary Fergusson

1.

[To Robert Fergusson.]

I read with attention the Burial-Letter you versified and your poetical Letter to the Cripple Laureat:¹ the former I approve of; but cannot recommend ye latter in point of rhyme. You'll please notice that the first and fifth, and the second and fourth lines in compositions of the like kind, such as Habbie Simson, &c., chime with one another. At first when I came here, I imagined when one spoke of entering at a precise time, that he was serious; but now I see the contrary, and that their promises are only to tantalize me: for ever since the year 1601, that the court sat here, the Edinburghers have retained some of its fashions, and among the rest, flattery to a high degree.²

I have only eight scholars, but expect more. God grant they may not prove like one Campbell, who bilk'd me out of 2l. 2s. for instructions I gave him upon one foot. Although he has done me much evil, yet I shall not pray for him in the manner Paul, or some other apostle, did for Alexander the copper-smith.³

2.

[To Mrs. Fergusson.]

[To Mrs. Fergusson.]

Salisbury at Plymouth, 4th Aug., 1770.

Kirkwall Road, 13th May, 1768.

My Dear Mother,

D[ea]r Mother,

After an agreeable passage, I arrived here on Wednesday last, having not been in the least sea-sick. I was

1. James Wilson. He went by the name of "Claudero" and wrote several small volumes of semi-humorous and smutty poetry which were published in Edinburgh in the 60's and 70's.
2. Hary had probably just opened his school in November 1767, and here he refers to persons who had promised to patronize him.
3. Grosart (Works, pp. lix, lx) quotes the first paragraph. The whole is quoted by Irving (pp. 22, 23), but Grosart's partial quotation seems to be more exact, so that has been used. From a subsequent mention of the "New Theatre" in an unprinted part of the letter, it can be dated April 1768 (McDiarmid, p. 93).

on shore yesterday, and had an inclination to buy some tea for you, but that article is at present as dear here as in Edinburgh. If we go for Shetland, shall buy some there, as they tell me it is at no higher a price than 3s. p. pound. The manner of living here agrees with me very well. Yesterday I dined for the first time on salted pork, and made as hearty a meal of it as ever I did in my life. If R[obert] is at home, desire him to cause the St. Andrews carrier to leave any word or letter, at Mrs. Currie's, on the * * * [torn away] for me, as she will forward it to Leith Road. Boats belonging to the ship go ashore every day. I have received about 20s. for foils, with which I have bought two cotton check shirts and a pair of shoes which were too little for my comrade and exactly fitted me. We are uncertain how long our stay may be, therefore, whatever you have to say must be deferred till we come to Cromarty, where we will stay to take in beer, and from [that] place I shall write you. Beef sells here at 1-1/2d. p. pound, and 14 eggs for a penny. Shall be glad this finds you free of trouble with respect to necessitous circumstances, and accordingly,

I ever am, D[ea]r Mother,

Yours affectionately,

Hary Fergusson.

Compts to sister, her husband, and family, &c.,⁴

3.

[To Mrs. Fergusson.]

Salisbury at Plymouth, 4th Aug., 1770.

My Dear Mother,

You have the greatest reason of any mother living to call a son's ingratitude in question, both on account of my bad behaviour toward you when living together, and my long silence

4. Grosart, Works, p. ciii. The address is: "Mrs. Fergusson, in Jamieson's Land, Bell's Wynd, Edinburgh."

since our separation. On the 18th of April, the day of Wilkie's⁵ enlargement, I was seized with the fever and ague; on the 3d May I was sent to Rochester Hospital, where I staid till discharged in the beginning of June. After coming on board, I relapsed and was very dangerously ill, but, thanks to God, and the good attendance of the surgeons, I recovered, and am now as well as ever I was since the moment I existed. You will easily perceive by the date of this [that] I have left the Augusta, but thank God the change is for the better. When this ship was put in commission, I was advised by some friends to apply to go out in her as master-at-arms; this I could not then do, being so very bad [ill], but about the beginning of last month, as I was then able to crawl up and down, I applied, and though there were upwards of thirty candidates, carried my point, having strong recommendations, but, above all, on account of my knowledge of the sword, which has procured me bread here, when many Scots clerks were starving. The ship is to sail to-morrow for the Halifax station in North America, where, and on the passage, we shall be twixt three and four years from England. As we carry both a commodore and captain, the berth I enjoy is upon that account more lucrative than when only the latter goes. The last master-at-arms in the commodore ship, on that station made an immense sum by being provost-martial at trials; with that chance (my pay p. annum) and fencing dues I shall be able to lay up a good deal of money.

Never [knew] I, what real motherly affection was, till I fell sick, having been obliged to lay out every farthing I had for extra cordials, &c., but these are of little service when compared to the real advantages that flow from the mother's attendance. D[ea]r mother, the climate where we are bound for is so remarkably cold, that I was obliged to buy things suitable to it from top to toe, every article being three prices in that part of the world, and this took up all the trifle I had. I assure you, I am now as careful as formerly I was lavish, having nothing more at heart than to contribute to the maintenance of you at my return. Make my best respects to Mr. and Mrs. Inverarity, to Rob, Peggy, Nan Colly, old Scoroble, John Parker

shot James Leggat another marine of whom he instantly

5. McDiarmid (p. 95) emends this to "[John] Wilkes's." Wilkes had recently been released from prison (17 April 1770).

7. According to the log, and this held up their sailing. Later Harry, having become a Master-at-Arms, joined the Tartar.

8. Grosart, *Works*, pp. civ, cv. The letter is addressed to "Mrs. Elisabeth Fergusson, to the care of Mr. David Inverarity, Wright, Peebles Wynd, Edinburgh."

and spouse, &c., &c.

I am, D[ea]r Mother,

Your loving Son,

Hy. Fergusson.

P. S.--Yesterday in the morning a most melancholy accident happened on board this ship. As one of the mariners was playing with his piece, it went off and killed a Glasgow lad of the same corps, who sate directly opposite to him. The half of his head was shot away and his brains scattered about the deck in a most shocking manner: what is very remarkable, the principal person is from the Hulks [?] in Kdy parish, and is called Grierson.⁶

Don't write until you hear again from me, as it is yet uncertain whether we go to Halifax or Boston.^{7&8}

4.

[To Robert Fergusson.]

D[ea]r Robt.

Since the beginning of last month, when I was favoured with yours of the 1st Feby 1773, I have been in most rivers in this Province and Maryland. Our business was to look out after smugglers; and had we been as active in that duty as others on the American station, I might have been enabled to make my appearance in a brilliant manner: but alas! only a sloop of 80 tons from the West Indies, laden with coffee and sugar, fell to our lot. I had 16 dollars

6. Log of the Salisbury (Ad. 51. 844, Public Record Office):

"[Friday 3 August 1770] At 6 Am Chrisr. Konig [?] a Centinel upon the Poop, his musket going off by accident shot James Leggat another marine of wch. he instantly expired." "Hulks" was a word commonly used for a prison ship. "Kdy" is certainly an abbreviation for Kildrummy.

7. The men of the Salisbury were detailed to work on the Tartar, according to the log, and this held up their sailing. Later Hary, having become a Master-at-Arms, joined the Tartar.

8. Grosart, Works, pp. civ, cv. The letter is addressed to "Mrs. Elizabeth Fergusson, to the care of Mr. David Inverarity, Wright, Peebles Wynd, Edinburgh."

for my share, 3 of which I gave towards buying a Tender, and every foremast man paid one. The Tender is now mann'd, arm'd, and cruizing Chesapeak Bay, and I am convinced cannot fail of taking prizes; if the officers appointed for that duty are attentive.

We had the most severe winter at Halifax ever experienced in that country. The harbour, though 3 miles across, was frozen over for three weeks; the ship's company walk'd aboard and ashore, nay, all our provisions were got aboard on the ice (which in many places was 36 f[ee]t in thickness), notwithstanding the strong N. W. winds which blow most of the winter. When we arrived at Boston we were ordered to this country, which has been as hot this summer as the former was cold in winter. Such a change of climate could not fail to create sickness in the ship's company: but, thank God, only three have died, one a natural death, and the other two drown'd. I had a very severe fitt of sickness at our first coming here; but being so much given to sweating it proved an effectual cure, although I am very weak through that means. I never lived so badly, as aboard here, in point of provisions, every species being the worst of their kinds, and neither butter nor flour to be had.

I desire you will write by the packet on receipt, for if you lay hold of any other opportunity, your letter will be too late; the ship being positively ordered home early next spring, to my great satisfaction, being quite tired of a life that my past follies drove me to, and to which I have served too long an apprenticeship. If every thing does not succeed to my expectations, on my arrival in England, I am fully bent to return and settle in this country; having had the fairest offers imaginable, could my discharge have been procured. In Virginia and Maryland in particular, I could do best by acting in a double capacity, by learning [teaching] the small sword, and the exercise of the small arms, there being no regular forces in either province, and the officers of the militia being quite ignorant themselves of that part of their duty.

I desire it as a favour, [that] you would often examine your poetical pieces before you commit them to the press: this advice I hope you'll the more readily take, as most young authors are apt to be more criticized than those who have had a little experience. Pope himself was one of the most careful in this respect, and none yet has ever surpass'd him. When I arrive in England, I shall give you the necessary directions how to send your works, and make no doubt of selling them to advantage, when the ship is paid off.

In part by Campbell, Irving, and Peterkin; Osgood reported to be setting it forth in full from the manuscript. I doubt he repeated what seems to have been Campbell's manner of showing omissions ("&c., &c."), I doubt that he had the letter in manuscript.

I am sorry to hear of J. Wright's⁹ death: he was a worthy young lad, and one I had a true regard for.

Thick Peter¹ I hope by this time is recovered. I should be glad to hear of Robertson and Addison's success: the latter, if in Edinb[urgh], I desire to be kindly remember'd to. I should also be happy to hear how Sandie Young and John Coomans do, having experienced their kindness, and been happy in their company. In our passage from Boston to Hampton, we had a very narrow escape for [with] our lives, being surrounded with one of the largest water-spouts ever seen, which black'ned the sky for some leagues, and, had we not barely weather'd it, would have sunk the ship and every soul aboard.

Remember me in the strongest manner to my mother, Peggy, [Inve]rarities, Father Parker, &c. &c. If you want to either succeed, or gain esteem, be very careful of what company you keep: this advice I hope you'll take, as it comes from one who has lost himself merely through inattention in that respect. Believe me, it is impossible to write you as I would chuse, being invironed with twenty thousand noisy plagues, not to mention exacractions so horrid, that [they] would make the greatest blackguard in Edin[burgh]'s hair stand erect. I hope you'll make it your particularcare to study such branches of education as may prove most conducive to your future happiness, and appear at least once every Sunday in church (I mean the Church of Scotland), for how can you spend your time better? I was, like many, fond of the Church of England's forms, &c. &c., but having been in many Romish Churches since, find these forms are merely the * * * of laziness, and differ but very little from one another: this you can be convinced of, in perusing a Romish mass-book in English.

I am, with greatest regard,

D[ea]r Rob, your affectionate Brothe[r],
Hary Fergusson.

P. S.--Direct for me on board the Tartar, Hampton Road, Virginia.²

9. James Wright, Baxter?

1. Peter Williamson [?], the colorful Edinburgh character who compiled the first Edinburgh Directory.

2. Grosart, Works, pp. cvi-cviii. The letter is dated, "Tartar, in Rappahannock River, Virginia, 8th of October 1773," and addressed to "Mr. Robert Fergusson, to the care of Mr. Walter Ruddiman, jr., Printer, Edinburgh." It had been published in part by Campbell, Irving, and Peterkin; Grosart purported to be setting it forth in full from the manuscript. Since he repeated what seems to have been Campbell's manner of showing ommissions ("&c., &c."), I doubt that he had the letter in manuscript.

5.

[To Mrs. Fergusson.]

Tartar in Halifax Harbour,
6th May, 1775.

D[ea]r Mother,

I received your letter of the 29th October last, containing the very disagreeable news of my brother's death, and acquainting me of Peggy's being married to one Mr. Alexander Duval who, you say, is in a very good way, but the particular branch of business he follows you forgot to mention. It is beyond the power of human invention to describe how I was affected by the loss of an only brother, who always had my interest at heart, and with whom I was yet in hopes to have spent many agreeable days. But that there is no certainty on this side the grave is a truth that we daily experience, and plainly proves that to repine is weakness in the highest degree. I earnestly desire you'll take care of all the papers and writings as he left [a seaman's phrase] for my perusal, for I shall be more pleas'd in being possess'd of them than riches, as the former may serve to perpetuate the memory which the latter can never do.

We are now actually at war with the Americans. A skirmish happen'd at a place ca * * * [torn away] on the 18th ulto. betwixt the Provincials or rebels and * * * [torn away] Majesty's * * * by * * * overpowered * * * after they had burnt two magazines of the enemies stores, obliged to retreat 15 or 18 miles through an incessant fire from behind the stone walls and breaches on the roadside.³ No certain account of the loss on either side has as yet been published, but the rebels, it is said, have sustained treble the loss of the army. Both camps are so near that the sentries of each army can discourse together on their posts, and the rebels

3. The skirmish was the beginning of the American Revolution. Major Pitcairn marched from Boston to confiscate illegal arms held at Concord by the famous "Minute Men" of that town. This rebel militia met the British troops on the bridge at Concord and Lexington, where was fired "the shot heard round the world." Compelled to return to Boston, Pitcairn's soldiers were mercilessly harrassed all the way by scattered Minute Men hidden along the route. The British losses were numerous.

augment daily. Several places have lately been burnt by the army; and it is expected by this, that the town of Marblehead is reduced to ashes.⁴ No fresh provisions are to be had for any price in New England, and an entire stop is put to all trade. We are ordered here as a safeguard over the dockyard, where we do duty for fear of the disaffected attempting to set it on fire. Night before last, the New England people here set fire to a quantity of hay that was to have been purchased for the use of the troops at Boston, which obliges us to be more vigilant than formerly. I am glad that the money you received came so opportunely; whenever a remittance is made you shall not be forgot. My greatest desire is, to get home and settle for the remainder of my days, being, as I wrote you before, heartily tired of this way of life.

Remember me in the strongest manner to Mr. and Mrs. Inverarity and family, to Mr. and Mrs. Duval, and all acquaintances; and do not forget to inform me what day of the month my brother expired on, and the disease.

I am, Dear Mother,

Your affectionate Son,
Hary Fergusson.⁵

Stylistically several of the songs added to this opera in Edinburgh can be given immediately to Fergusson. A few of Fergusson's favorite words are used repeatedly in the Royal Shepherd songs, but these were the common currency of the century. The lines following "By Him the morning darts his purple ray" in Fergusson's Pastoral Night are a paraphrase of Song 8, and Phoebus and music are

4. Marblehead, Massachusetts, is a seaside town, though not a port. On 19 April 1775 there was another skirmish there as the call to arms pervaded the colony. A ship lying off Marblehead threatened to bombard and burn the town (Advertiser, 30 June-4 July 1775).

5. Grosart, Works, pp. cviii-cx. The letter is addressed to "Mrs. Elizabeth Fergusson, to the care of Mr. David Inverarity, wright, New Edinburgh." The Inveraritys had moved to Canal Street in the New Town.

Song 19, and contains this line: "Till death, the ghastly

monarch, shuts the scene." APPENDIX I: "Till death close the scene..." Town and Country Contrasted offers the same coincidence: "He closed the

scene." Song 10 should be compared with Braid Claith and Song No repose can I discover is attributed to Fergusson in The Scots Musical Museum (v. II) and, since Stephen Clarke was musical editor of the Museum, the evidence points to his authorship. It was written for TenduCCI when the latter was revising the opera The Royal Shepherd for the Edinburgh production of January 1769.

Stylistically several of the fourteen new songs added to this opera in Edinburgh can be given immediately to Fergusson. A few of Fergusson's favorite words are used repeatedly in the Royal Shepherd songs, but these were the common currency of the century. The lines following "By Him the morning darts his purple ray" in Fergusson's Pastoral Night are a paraphrase of Song 8, and Phoebus and music are again connected in The Rivers of Scotland. The sentiments of Song 16 are those of Verse 9 of The Delights of Virtue. In Song 26 the use of the words impart and soul in juxtaposition recalls Verse 3 of Amidst a rosy bank of flowers. An Expedition to Fife describes the hazards of the sailor's life, as does Song 19, and contains this line: "Till death, the ghastly

and allows each to marry his own betrothed.
 monarch, shuts the scene." And Song 19: "Till death close
 the scene..." Town and Country Contrasted offers the same
 coincidence: "Nor cease till envious Death hath closed the
 scene." Song 10 should be compared with Braid Claith and
 Song 23 with The Daft Days. If Songs 8, 16, 19, 22 and 26
 have a definite basis for attribution to Fergusson, it is
 logical to assume that the rest of the fourteen are his.
 (It should be noted, however, that the second stanza of
 Song 3 is not Fergusson's, and Songs 7 and 10 are merely
 revisions of the original songs of the opera.)

A summation of the opera may be helpful in the understanding
 of these songs.

Amintas, a shepherd in Sidon, has unfortunately fallen in
 love with Eliza, a lady of noble birth. Alexander the Great
 has conquered Sidon and desires to restore the country's rightful
 ruler to the throne. That ruler is Amintas, but he himself is
 unaware of the fact. Agenor, a nobleman, guides Alexander to
 Amintas. Presumably Amintas is now in a position to marry
 Eliza, but Alexander complicates matters by projecting the
 marriage of Amintas and Thamiris. Thamiris, however, loves
 Agenor. Just at the point when the four are ready to abandon
 all for their respective loves, Alexander learns of the conflict

Heaven should exalt my state,
 Heaven will exalted thoughts inspire,
 And fit me to be great.

and allows each to marry his own betrothed.

In the opera Amintas sings Songs 3, 7, 8 (with Eliza), 16, 17, 22, and 23; Eliza sings Song 24; Agenor has Songs 19 and 25; Thamiris sings Song 26; and Alexander sings Songs 4 and 28. Song 10 is sung by the chorus. The new songs of the Edinburgh edition, with the exception of 10, 16, 17, 19, and 23, appeared in the opera Amintas when Tenducci produced it in London. The tune of No repose was Braw, Braw Lads of Galla Water; Songs 16 and 19 were probably sung to The Braes of Ballandine and Lochaber No More respectively.

The music of The Royal Shepherd is preserved in The Overture, Duets, & Quartets in the Opera of the Royal Shepherd... properly disposed for the Voice and Harpsichord (London [1764]) at the British Museum. The Mitchell Library in Glasgow also has editions of the opera with music.

The songs follow and are numbered as they appear in the opera.

Songs from The Royal Shepherd

Song 3

Tho' I this humble garb do wear,
And be of fortune low,
A shepherd still shall I appear,
Nor wish more great to grow.

But if, against my own desire,
Heaven should exalt my state,
Heaven will exalted thoughts inspire,
And fit me to be great.

Song 4

Tho' Heav' 'Till now the Heavens were my guide,
 My mind' Conquering foes on every side,
 Nor shall And each star propitious shines,
 Chase from Fav'ring still my bold designs.

May they on this action smile,
 And befriend me all the while,
 They who zealously inclin'd
 With justice to adorn my mind.

Him that gave the royal sway;

May I still in mind retain

How I rul'd

Song 7

That with bounty I may learn,

Can I know from whence arise

All these tender heaving sighs,

And this mild consuming flame,

Thrilling thro' my vital frame?

My fears still oppress me, I'm troubled with grief,

No aid doth approach

Song 8

My mind's still uneasy with anxious cares,

'Till now Phoebus arising, and betray my false fears.

His beams doth display,

The sail And music enticing when dangers appear,

Surveys the Proclaims the new day.

No hope, no blest refuge, no safety he'll find,

'Till death from his CHORUS and cares free his mind.

May fair Cupid send love,

Transporting this pair,

Their cares to remove,

And enliven the fair.

AMINT.

Song 10

Let our mirth and joy proclaim

Great Amintas' happy name;

May such merit be renown'd,

And may virtue still be crown'd:

May he free from trouble reign,

And his subjects peace maintain;

Tyrants' stormy laws shall die,

Pleasing calms shall round us fly.

ELIZA.

While shepherds Song 16 prove,
Slighting their former love,

Tho' Heaven's good pleasure has alter'd my state,
My mind's still the same, tho' by fortune I'm great;
Nor shall mighty conquests and sudden alarms,
Chase from my fond heart my true love's dear charms.

Am I banish'd from your mind?
Shall I no more favour find?

Song 17

AMINT.

Let's away, and sigh alone,

and
AGEN.

Send me means which will repay
Him that gave the royal sway;
May I still in mind retain
How I rul'd my fleecy train, rest,
That with bounty I may learn,
With peace and justice to govern.
Free our sad soul from fears.

THAM.

Are the Fates Song 19
Are our vows out of mind?

My fears still oppress me, I'm troubled with grief,
No aid doth approach me, no happy relief,
My mind's still uneasy with anxious cares,
'Till death close the scene, and betray my false fears.

Shall we our sufferings know,

The sailor, thus frightened when dangers appear,
Surveys the swift billows around him with fear;
No hope, no blest refuge, no safety he'll find,
'Till death from his troubles and cares free his mind.

Cruel Fortune, cease to frown,

Take again your sable crown;

Song 21

Let gay looks from lovers dart,

And enliven every heart:

Let our souls QUARTETTO from grief,

And each lover find relief;

AMINT.

Ah! Eliza, did you know blest,
How you fill my breast with woe,
You'd cease to wound my heart,
Or cruel sounds impart.

Hear me, then, ye Fates above,
Send fresh comfort to my love,
And crown her soul with peace,
Her mind with friendly ease.

Can I stay when she's not near me?

Cruel Fates, once deign to hear me.

ELIZA. While shepherds cruel prove,
Slighting their former love,
Tell me, Amintas, then,
Are you still that humble swain,
Who by me your flocks wou'd feed,
Playing on your tuneful reed;
Am I banish'd from your mind?
Shall I no more favour find?

AMINT.
and
AGEN. Let's away, and sigh alone,
All our former peace is gone;
Joy fills the peasants breast,
They alone are truly blest;
When the Nobles' births are crost,
And in many troubles lost.
Don't move us with your tears,
Free our sad soul from fears.

THAM. Are the Fates so unkind?
Are our vows out of mind?
Are you so cruel grown,
Your true lover to disown?
Tell me why you thus complain,
Frowning on us with disdain?
Shall we our sufferings know,
The source of all our woe?

CHORUS

Cruel Fortune, cease to frown,
Take again your subtle crown;
Let gay looks from lovers dart,
And enliven every heart:
Let our souls be freed from grief,
And each lover find relief;
That Shepherds ever may be blest,
And Shepherdesses sweet carest.

Song 22

No repose can I discover,
Nor find joy without my lover;
Can I stay when she's not near me?
Cruel Fates, once deign to hear me.

The charms of grandeur don't decoy me;
 Fair Eliza must enjoy me;
 My crown and sceptre I'll resign;
 The shepherd's life shall still be mine.

Song 23

When chilling frosts their visits pay,
 And frigid Winter bears the sway;
 If then with flow'rs the hills are crown'd,
 And leafy trees adorn the ground,
 Tell me then my faithless heart
 No soothing pity can impart.

Song 24

No sweet refuge can I find,
 Since my lover proves unkind;
 Can you then behold my pain,
 And such cruel thoughts maintain?

Fortune, frowning with disdain,
 Hears my vows and sighs in vain:
 My lover's gone, I will not rest,
 A thousand fears distract my breast.

Song 25

May those bright eyes for ever see
 That morning's golden rays,
 Which stole my lover's heart away,
 And brought thy happy days.

Let Phoebus, when that morn he spies,
 The earth with joy survey;
 May beauty gild the chearful skies,
 And hail the bounteous day.

1. Sir Complaints was Alexander Pope's poem. The song is a parody of *The Broom of Bonmahon*.
2. A section of Edinburgh, in the eighteenth century a separate municipality.
3. Gilbert Auchincloss (pronounced 'Auchincloss'), Sir Laurence.
4. Ketherbow Fort was one of the old city gates at the lower end of the main street. It stood until 1743. The spot where it had been is referred to.

Song 26

Agenor, sure, does not deserve
 For me to suffer so;
 From our past vows I'll never swerve,
 But calm his present woe.
 My crown I freely will resign
 For fond Agenor's charms;
 No more shall my fond heart repine,
 But fly into his arms.

II

Sure he who wou'd my thoughts condemn,
 No valour can impart;
 No virtue can his soul inflame,
 Or grow within his heart.
 Love's pleasant days laid up in store,
 Shall bounteously repay
 Our present woes, when we no more
 Shall meet with such delay.

Cape Club SongsA Mournful Ditty from the Knight of Complaints¹

MOTTO

What should I do up toun my business lies all in the Canongate²

How blyth was I ilk day to see
 Auchleck³ come tripping doun
 His ain forestair at Netherbow⁴
 To drink his dram at Noon

5- Concordia Fratrum 1888, the motto of the Cape Club. A
 'lucky' was a tavern keeper.

1. Sir Complaints was Alexander Clapperton. The song is a parody of The Broom of Cowdenknowes.
2. A section of Edinburgh, in the eighteenth century a separate municipality.
3. Gilbert Auchinleck (pronounced 'Affléck'), Sir Launce.
4. Netherbow Port was one of the old city gates at the lower end of the main street. It stood until 1769. The spot where it had been is referred to.

Chorus

Oh the Shades the Caller Caller Shades
 Where I have oft complained
 Till Luckies Bottle C. F. D.⁵
 Was to the bottom drain'd

II

I neither wanted drink nor dram
 Whan Tam Dicks⁶ house was nigh
 But now in Canongate I dwell
 A dismal place and dry

III

Hard fate that I should banish'd be
 Gang heavily and mourn
 Because I lovd the Warmest dram
 That Eer in Mouth did burn

IV

She brought a Gill sae Strong and Sweet
 The Knights stood drouthy by
 Even Pitcher Hume⁷ in dumbness gazd
 He was so very dry

V

Our Bottle and the Little Stoup
 That held our wee soup dram
 Ye Thirsty Knights for Liquor Coup
 I Will not Care a Damn

8. A line is erased and a revision inserted in Fergusson's hand.

5. Concordia Fratrum Decus, the motto of the Cape Club. A 'lucky' was a tavern keeper.
6. Two persons named Dick were vintners in Edinburgh, but neither bore 'Tam' as a first name. The Edinburgh Directory of 1773-4 lists "Dick Alexander, president-stairs, parliament-close" and "Dick Robert, Milln's square." Perhaps 'Tam' was a nickname for one of them.
7. Possibly William Hume, an upholsterer, Sir Waterhole in the Cape.

Song

Be Eavy hush be Censure Dumb
 Deep buried in VI lonely tomb
 For Worth must now resplendent Shine
 Adieu ye Cooling Shades adieu
 Farewell my forenoons Gill
 By Tam Dicks fire Ill Sitt no more⁸
 My Hours all to kill--⁹
 Genius Shall tour on lofty wing
 And Laurels shall perpetual Spring

The progress of Knighthood

The Masses brightest only shines
 And Summer shall rebounded Smile
 By
 To Crown our Joy and bless our Toil⁴

The Knight of Precentor--

Tune In Infancy--¹
Tune, Hump of Ridding

In Infancy the Cape was small
 Few Knights assembled there
 Nor to adorn their spacious Hall
 Did one Green Stoup appear
 No Pitching then or song was heard
 Brisk Laughter to afford
 But now some score of Vocal Knights
 With Musick hail the Board
 On all around bright Candles shine
 And Brown Stouts² Coal burns clear
 A Coal whose Influence divine
 The dullest Knight can chear
 Fresh streams of Porter deep imbrown'd
 Remove our care and pain
 And they who taste thereof but once
 Must surely taste again--³

8. A line is erased and a revision inserted in Fergusson's hand.
9. La. II 334/2, Edinburgh University.
1. The song In Infancy is from Artaxerxes.
2. Sir Brown Stout was Thomas Law, a merchant. Obviously Law was supplying the coal to heat Capehall, the place of meeting.
3. La. III 464, p. 83.
5. Quoted from The Goldfinch, A Choice Collection of the Most Celebrated Songs (Edinburgh 1777), p. 126. There is an earlier appearance in The Nightingale (Edinburgh 1776).

Song

Be Envy hush be Censure Dumb
 Deep buried in a gloomy tomb
 For Worth must now resplendent Shine
 In harmonys Sweet Breath divine

Tis Ours the worthy name to raise
 Immortal by our tuneful Lays
 Genius Shall tour on Lofty wing
 And Laurels shall perpetual Spring

St Luke shall Every honour Claim
 The Muses brightest only theme
 And Summer shall unbounded Smile
 To Crown our Joy and bless our Toil⁴

Drinking SongTune, Lumps of Pudding

Hollo! keep it up boys--and push around the glass,
 Let each seize his bumper, and drink to his lass:
 Away with dull thinking--'tis madness to think--
 And let those be sober who've nothing to drink.
 Tal de ral, &c.

Silence that vile clock, with its iron tongu'd bell,
 Of the hour that's departed still ringing the knell:
 But what is't to us that the hours flie away;
 'Tis only a signal to moisten the clay.

Huzza, boys! let each take a bumper in hand,
 And stand--if there's any one able to stand.
 How all things dance round me!--'tis life, tho' my boys:
 Of drinking and spewing how great are the joys?

My head! oh my head!--but no matter, 'tis life;
 Far better than mopping[sic] at home with one's wife.
 The pleasures of drinking you're sure must be grand,
 When I'm neither able to think, speak, nor stand.⁵

4. MS. 2041, National Library. In manuscript the song appears without a title. St. Luke is the patron saint of painters. The script of this song is barely legible; it has all the characteristics of Fergusson's hand and a comparison with other examples of his handwriting, such as the presentation inscription to Gavin Wilson in the National Library copy of the 1773 Poems, leaves no doubt in my mind that this is Fergusson's composition.
5. Quoted from The Goldfinch, A Choice Collection of the Most Celebrated Songs (Edinburgh 1777), p. 156. There is an earlier appearance in The Nightingale (Edinburgh 1776).

APPENDIX J

For writing Brodie's inventory, 10.
 For a sheet of stamp paper, 10. in part.
 For do., 18. Documents Concerning the Commissary Office
 For writing Fergusson's testament, 10.

1. Fergusson's Memoranda of his copy work.

I. Record

Decreet of divorce, Pirie g. Backie, 30	£0	3	1-1/2	[27 July 1770]
Decreet adherence, Galloway g. Laidlas, 24	0	2	6	[13 Sept. 1769]
Decreet divorce, Rt. Keil g. White, 12	0	1	3	[8 March 1769]
Divorce, Paterson g. Ramsay, 9	0	0	11-1/4	[14 Oct. 1767]
Divorce, Chalmers against Marr, 50	0	5	2-1/2	[10 Sept. 1766]
	£0	13	0	[sic]
Decreet divorce, Thomson g. Laurie, 22	0	2	7-1/2	[24 Oct. 1766]
	£0	15	7-1/2	

II. Cash Account

For writing depositions	£0	2	0	
For do.	0	1	0	
For registering protests	0	0	6-1/2	
For writing an infetement	0	2	6	
For an eik	0	1	0	
For writing answer to the petition, James Sim	0	0	6	
	£0	7	6-1/2	
Edinburgh, 11th October 1770.				
For a testament, umql. Daniel M'Don[ald].	0	0	9	[11 Oct. 1770]
For a testament, umql. Adam Edmond	0	1	6	[16 Oct. 1770]

III.

For a testament, umql. James Veitch	£0	2	0	[17 Oct. 1770]
For transcribing an account	0	0	6	
	£0	4	9	
	0	7	8-1/2	
Amount of Cash, 18th October 1770	£0	12	5-1/2	
Received for the Record	0	13	0	
	£1	5	5-1/2	
	0	8	6	
	£1	13	11-1/2	

pp. lxxiii, lxxiv. I have inserted the d
 Grant, Francis J., ed., The Commissary's
 Register of Testaments, Part IV (Scottish
 Edinburgh 1872) and upon the decreets extant at the Registrar
 House.

IV.

Volume XII: "Decreet of Divorce [?] Robert Keill Against
 For writing Brodie's inventory, 1s.
 For a sheet of stamp paper, 1s. in part.
 For do., 1s.
 For writing Euphemia Dalrymple's testament, 1s. 6d.

V. Testaments.

Testament testamentar, umql. Alexander Veitch, 14.	[16 May 1771]
Testament testamentar, umql. Adam Edmond, 10, Pd.	[16 Oct. 1770]
Testament dative, umql. Daniel M'Donald, 6, Pd.	[11 Oct. 1770]
Testament dative, umql. Lillias Weir, 5, Pd.	[17 Dec. 1770]
Testament dative, umql. Alexander Veitch, 16s. Pd.	[16 May 1771]

January to June 1772 (very questionable)

VI.

Testament dative, umql. Euphemia Dalrymple.	[9 Nov. 1770]
Test. dative, Margar. Duncan, 14.	[19 Dec. 1770]
Test. dative, Captain Waulker [Wm. Wauchop?], 6.	[10 Jan. 1771]
Test. dative, John Mowatt, 27.	[24 Dec. 1770]
Test. testamentar, Agnes Brash, 12.	[14 Jan. 1771?]
Test. testamentar, [James] Skirving, 13.	[24 Jan. 1771]
Test. test. Marion Hogg, 10.	[18 Jan. 1771]
Test. dative, James Cairnes--	[18 Jan. 1771] ¹

2. Commissary documents at the Register House, Edinburgh, which are in Fergusson's script.

Register of Consistorial Processes

Volume XI: "Decreet of Divorce James Chalmers against Margaret Marr 10th Septemr 1766"
 "Decreet of Divorce Isobell Thomson against John Lawrie 24th October 1766"
 "Decreet of Divorce Elizabeth Paterson against George Ramsay 14 Octr 1767"

1. Grosart, Robert Fergusson, pp. 83, 84, collated with Works, pp. lxxiii, lxxiv. I have inserted the dates based upon Grant, Francis J., ed., The Commissariat Record of Edinburgh. Register of Testaments, Part III (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh 1899) and upon the decreets extant at the Register House.

Volume XII: "Decreet of Divorce Poor [?] Robert Keill against Helen White 8 March 1769"

"Decreet for Declarator of Marriage Adherence and Aliment Mary Galloway Against David Laidlaw 13 September 1769"

"Decreet of Divorce John Pirie Against Elizabeth Backie 27 July 1770"

The last three pages of the following appear to be in Fergusson's script: "Decreet of divorce, Houston Stewart Nicholson Esq a[gainst] Mrs. Margaret Porterfield [August 1771]"

Register of Testaments

January to June 1772 (very questionable)

It is very certain that Fergusson's copying appears nowhere else on the Registers, and it is unlikely that he wrote any other of the masses of documents belonging to the Commissary Office. (Separate deeds and a few testaments were written by lawyers' copyists and turned over to the Office.) His hand is not evident in the Sheriff Court records.

of Murrayfield,--as a small mark of Gratitude for his Patronage & Beneficence: The following juvenile productions are respectfully presented by his much obliged humble servt.

E. Fergusson.

Edin. 14th Janr. 1773.

The Murray copy was possessed by the late Lord Brougham and possibly still remains in the Brougham Library. The inscription, collated with the Brougham Catalogue transcript, is quoted from Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 103).

APPENDIX K

3. James Boswell.

Presentation Inscriptions in Copies of the 1773 Poems

1. Gavin Wilson.

To honest Gav'n the prince of Sooters
 Case makers patent Leather Booters
 He who Lays by his Strap & awl
 And after wark breaths out his Saul
 In bonny sangs he's never bleat
 To Cant the praise o bonny Kate
 While Biting Snishen Thins my nose
 Ill never rank him of my foes
 A Friend thro every fortunes blast
 That Sticks to me as lang's his Last

4. David Baird.

R. Fergusson

On another leaf are the lines by Wood beginning "Mild Nature..." (See Appendix L.) This volume is in the National Library of Scotland.

2. Alexander Murray.

To the Honble
 Alexander Murray Esq.
 of Murrayfield,--as a small
 mark of Gratitude for his
 Patronage & Beneficence:
 The following juvenile productions
 are respectfully presented by
 his much obliged humble servt.

R. Fergusson.

Edin. 14th Jany. 1773.

The Murray copy was possessed by the late Lord Rosebery and possibly still remains in the Barnbougale library. The inscription, collated with the Barnbougale Catalogue transcript, is quoted from Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 103).

3. James Boswell.

To James Boswell Esq. the Friend of Liberty and Patron of Science;
the following Efforts of a Scottish youth are respectfully
presented by his most obedient and very humble
servt. ~~mark of Esteem~~ R. Fergusson

The volume was in the possession of Mr. William Weir of
Edinr. And most humble
Kildonan and was exhibited at the Glasgow Burns Exhibition of
1896. Since the inscription was not given in the Catalogue, the
above is taken from Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 102).

Sir James Fergusson, present possessor of the copy, very

4. David Herd. the inscription.

To

7. William Welsh.

Mr David Herd
as a small mark of
Esteem & Friendship
from his much obliged
humble Servt
R. Fergusson

The book is in the Dyce Library in the Victoria and

The presentation page seems to have been pasted into the
Albert Museum.

1779 issue of the two parts, having been removed from the
original presentation copy. The book is at the St. Andrews
Library.

To
The pious & reverend
Mr Peter Miller

5. William Nairne. Minister of the Gospel

To
Wm Nairne, Esqur,
Advocate,
from his most humble
Servt.
R. Fergusson

This is in the British Museum. It once belonged to James

The copy was sold by Messrs. William Brown, Edinburgh, in
1936.

6. Sir Adam Fergusson.

To
 Sir Adam Fergusson
 Baronet
 As a Mark of Esteem
 From
 his most Obedient
 And most humble
 Edinr. Servant
 Septr. 1773

Ro Fergusson

Sir James Fergusson, present possessor of the copy, very kindly forwarded the inscription.

7. William Welsh.

To
 Mr Welsh
 From the Author

The book is in the Dyce Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

8. Peter Miller.

To
 The pious & reverend
 Mr Peter Miller
 Minister of the Gospel
 Dunbar
 From
 his most obliged
 Hum. Servant
 R Fergusson

This is in the British Museum. It once belonged to James Hogg.

9. Alexander Kidd.

Grosart (Robert Fergusson, p. 102) reports the existence of this copy. He does not give the inscription.

For fuller information on these presentation copies, see Law, Alexander, "Inscribed Copies of the First Edition (1773) of the Poems of Robert Fergusson," Edinburgh Bibliographical Society Transactions (Edinburgh 1954).

When Allan Ramsay died--the great grief'd
To be of such a valu'd friend bereav'd;
The loss was truly great!
Their inscriptions wisely they contrain'd,
Until a prais'd person they obtain'd
To fill the chair of state.

Many appear'd--Alas, how very few
Are those who can, with ease and taste, pursue
So arduous a plan!
The names scrutinis'd with piercing care,
And, fully pleas'd, did thus their choice declare,
"Rob. Fergusson's the man."

Go on, Enthusiast of the Scottish nation,
Still chime "Auld Reekie's song" and "auld strains;"
In troth they're smart and spry.
The laids and lasses all wad wae agree,
And chew their solid judgment, saying that
The laureate of their age.

Glasgow, Oct. 17. 1772

2. The G. K.-Stella poems.

APPENDIX L

The date of the Weekly Magazine in which each poem appeared precedes these selections.

Miscellaneous Poems and Epitaphs

[3 November 1774.]

1. Frederick J. Guion's "Laureate" poem (Weekly Magazine, 22 October 1772). That youthful Prodigy of Song.

The Muses Choice

To powers that o'er sorrow preside,
Who melt at --cuique sua dos.
Condescend a poor shepherd to guide,

When Allan Ramsay died!--the Muses griev'd
To be of such a valu'd friend bereav'd;
The loss was truly great!
Their inspirations wisely they restrain'd,
Until a proper person they obtain'd
To fill the chair of state.

Many appear'd--Alas, how very few
Are those who can, with ease and taste, pursue
So arduous a plan!
The Muses scrutiniz'd with piercing care,
And, fully pleas'd, did thus their choice declare,
"Rob. Fergusson's the man."

Go on, Musiast of the Scotian plains,
Still charm "Auld Reikie's sons wi' canty strains;"
In troth they're sweet and pretty.
The lads and lasses all must sure agree,
And shew their solid judgment, naming thee
The laureate of their city.

F. J. Guion.

Glasgow, Oct. 17. 1772 to the city were brought,
It seem'd to partake of the pain;
But almost as quickly as thought,
Mad mirth reassum'd its wild reign.

Montrose, Oct. 29.

2.7 The C. K.-Stella poems.

The date of the Weekly Magazine in which each poem appeared precedes these selections.

[3 November 1774.]

An Attempt towards a Pastoral Elegy to the Memory of Mr Robert Fergusson, That youthful Prodigy of Song.

...
Ye powers that o'er sorrow preside,
Who melt at the story of woe,
Condescend a poor shepherd to guide,
Make his tears and his numbers to flow.

He mourns not the proud, nor the great;
Such nothings he'd scorn to deplore:
He wou'd sing of young Corydon's fate,
Whose music will ravish no more.

Not a shepherd who pip'd on the plain,
Cou'd e'er in sweet melody vie;
The moment they listen'd his strain,
Their pipes were flung carelessly by.

...
He's bid an adieu to the plain,
An adieu that forbids a return:
He's quitted his pipe and his strain
For death and the mouldering urn.

Edin. Nov. 7. ...
When the news to the city were brought,
It seem'd to partake of the pain;
But almost as quickly as thought,
Mad mirth reassum'd its wild reign.

... C. K.

Montrose, Oct. 29.

[24 November 1774.]
[17 November 1774.]

To Stella, on her being dissatisfied with a Passage in the Author's

On Mr Robert Fergusson. By a Lady

Dear shepherd, how came you to say
That our grief was succeeded by mirth,
When the soul of the Bard flew away,
And his body scarce cold in the earth.

For myself I will answer with truth,
Altho' it is twelve years and more
Since wedlock did join me (in youth)
To a swain that I love and adore;

Yet surely I may be allow'd
Young Corydon's death to bemoan;
For, amongst a numerous croud,
I am not dejected alone.
Each night, when the nymphs and gay swains
Gather round me to spend the cool eve,
I silently steal from the plains,
And wander away to his grave.

Or to church-yard we gently should tread,
And bedeck his grave with the yew,
And pour our sad 'plaints to his shade.

The garland I wore he did make
With buds from his own, he did say:
While he liv'd I did wear't for his sake,
But now I will throw it away.
Should always unsunted appear.

...

Edin. Nov. 7. Stella.

He compos'd with sweet buds from his own;
That now it can please you no more
But away must be carelessly thrown.

Dear Stella, forbear the rash thought;
On thy brow it will richly perfume:
What Corydon's fingers have wrought,
Must delight, and unfadingly bloom.

Montrose, Nov. 21.

G. E.

[24 November 1774.]

To Stella, on her being dissatisfied with a Passage in the Author's

Elegy on Mr R. Fergusson.

Dear Stella (for dear is each maid,
And dear all the sorrowful throng,
For the loss of a swain who display'd
Such ravishing wonders in song)

'Twas pity perhaps that I told,
When the matchless young Corydon fled,
That sorrow soon quitted its hold,
And mirth thro' the city was spread:

You tell me your grief is sincere,
I believe it the dictate of truth;
Nor doubt that the myrtle thou'lt wear
For the Muses' most favourite youth.

[15 December 1774.]

Alas! I'm far distant from you,
Or to church-yard we gently should tread,
And bedeck his green grave with the yew,
And pour our sad 'plaints to his shade.

We would scorn suspicion's dark brow,
And folly's contemptuous leer;
For the virtue that's solid and true
Should always undaunted appear.

You tell me the garland you wore,
He compos'd with sweet buds from his own;
That now it can please you no more
But away must be carelessly thrown.

Dear Stella, forbear the rash thought;
On thy brow it will richly perfume:
What Corydon's fingers have wrought,
Must delight, and unfadingly bloom.

Montrose, Nov. 21.

C. K.

[1 December 1774.]

To Mr C. K. at Montrose.

Dear shepherd, I hope you'll excuse
The simple reproof I did give,
And altho' very weak is my Muse,
I'll wear the dear wreath while I live.

...

Suspicion's green eye I disdain;
With thee I could pleasantly stray;
We'd mourn the poetical swain,
And pour out our tears on his clay.

...

Edin. Nov. 28.

Stella

[15 December 1774.]

To Stella

Dear Stella, thou'rt friendly and kind;
My thanks, like fair Truth, are sincere:
[I] could almost say, curse on my mind,
If ingratitude e'er harbour'd there!

...

Believe me, I highly admire
Your goodness and candour conjoin'd:
O would ev'ry nymph but aspire
At such true elevation of mind!

...

Montrose, Dec. 3.

C. K.

That you're return'd, I'm glad to hear,
Then teach me how late love to bear.
Oh! how shall I that loss deplore,
When we shall part to meet no more?

[22 December 1774.]

A Pastoral Dialogue, on parting with a female Friend.

DAMON.

Dearest Stella, why that tear?
Let me know the cause, my dear:
Let thy friend, thy Damon, know
Whence these secret mournings flow;
Why, when I my passion tell,
Your breast with stifled heavings swell:
Your eyes o'ercharg'd with dropping tears,
Tell me, Stella, what thy fears?
Pray heav'n I could thy pangs remove:
Tell me, Stella, is it love?

STELLA.

Love! what's love? my Damon, tell,
Did it spring from heav'n or hell?
Sure from hell it took its birth,
By the ills it spreads on earth.
Was that love that Helen had,
When she left her husband's bed?
Madly fled away to Troy
With a beardless coward boy?
No, Damon, that is not the thing,
My griefs from sacred friendship spring.

DAMON.

Now I know what pains your heart,
That you and Mira soon must part.
Mira, charming, lovely fair!
Possess'd of all that's good and rare:
Heavenly sense, with beauty join'd,
Serenely sweet, and calm her mind.
How oft to her did I complain
Of your harsh coyness and disdain?
"Dear Shepherd! that is not the way
"To gain her love," she'd smiling say:
"Call her your friend; her heart you'll move:
"She hates the pangs of raging love."
Her sweet advice has much refin'd,
And cool'd this madness in my mind.

STELLA.

That you're reform'd, I'm glad to hear,
Then teach me how this loss to bear.
Oh! how shall I that loss deplore,
When we shall part to meet no more?

DAMON.

If Mira's grief can ought avail,
 List', Stella, and I'll tell a tale--
 Last night, as I my flocks stray'd wide
 Upon the river's hilly side,
 I saw your Mira's flock alone,
 And wonder'd where the maid had gone.
 My flocks for thirst flew to the flood,
 Whilst on the mountain's brow I stood:
 Then casting down my eyes between
 The knotted oak on that sweet green,
 Where we so merry oft have been,
 I saw the lovely nymph reclin'd
 Her jetty locks play'd with the wind:
 Her face was like an April flow'r,
 New water'd with an April show'r:
 Her head upon her hand was laid,
 Her crook thrown by--the careless maid
 Saw not where her lambkins stray'd;
 Then turning up her beauteous eyes,
 "This is a bitter cup!" she cries.
 "You cruel fates! revoke your doom:
 "Ye heav'nly pow'rs! then grant my boon,
 "That I may never leave these plains,
 "Where innocence and friendship reigns.
 "To leave my Stella here alone,
 "How will she mourn when I am gone!"
 More she had said, but me she spy'd,
 Then hung her head, and inward sigh'd;
 I smil'd, to change her mournful strain;
 She rose--we sought you on the plain.

STELLA.

Oh, fatal search! for me you found
 All prostrate on the dewy ground,
 My hair unbound, my bosom bare,
 All marks of my unfeign'd despair.
 To think that we so soon must part,
 It strains the cords that bind my heart;
 That she so soon to climes* must go,
 Where all is gallantry and show:
 Then surely Mira soon will change,
 And after richer friends will range;
 For there no friend that's poor's thought kind,
 No one that's poor can friendship find:
 Riches the god that they adore,

* England

Our friends once there, are friends no more:
 To these my Mira soon must go;
 What pow'r can mitigate my woe?
 I never will forget the day
 My fav'rite lambkin† breathless lay:
 Her sympathetic soul fresh flows,
 And bears a part in all my woes.
 When she is gone that shar'd my heart,
 To whom shall I my griefs impart?

Edinburgh, Dec.

[27 April 1775.]

DAMON.

To me--My sweetest Stella! I
 Will still be here when danger's nigh.
 Thy woes and cares, I'll bear them all,
 When you for my assistance call:
 No tales of love you then shall hear--
 Tales that so much offend your ear.
 If Stella will in me confide,
 My very sex I'll lay aside:
 My passions all subdu'd shall be,
 If thou wilt make a friend of me.
 Thy flocks at morn I'll lead abroad,
 Whilst thou'rt soliciting the god,
 The gentle god, who sleep bestows,
 And soothes the cares of waking woes;
 Mean-while fresh garlands I'll prepare,
 To deck my Stella's auburn hair.
 No sweet reward I'll ask for this,
 No soft embrace, no fragrant kiss:
 Impatient for a smile I'll stand,
 Perhaps forget, and kiss your hand;
 But do not frown with angry eyes;
 For if you do, your shepherd dies:
 And when death, with his awful gloom,
 Shall shake a yew-tree o'er my tomb,
 Say, wilt thou shed a friendly tear,
 And wish thy swain in heav'n or here.

3. William Woods' poems and STELLA.

No, shepherd, happy be thy days,
 Long may you live my verse to praise:
 Thy promis'd friendship I'll enjoy,
 For real friendships never cloy:
 Then take my hand in pledge of this,
 Imprint on it a breathing kiss;
 That I will never take amiss.

† A child

And may
 Dost thou
 Has Pain,
 That shook
 Has Reason chas'd the troubles of thy Brain,
 I'd her native empire there again?
 Has HEALTH, first bliss! her saving arm inclin'd,
 And giv'n thy Body strength to suit thy Mind?--

DAMON.

Yes! it is true--Again I see thee smile;
 Again I view thee Sacred friendship! heav'nly fire!
 With artless Unmix'd with gross impure desire;
 And twine In thee we'll live, in thee we'll die,
 For all the All other passions we'll defy.
 By Sympathy, by Sentiment refin'd,

Edinburgh, Dec. 13.

Stella.

[27 April 1775.]

The Request. A Song.Tune, Lovely Nymph.

Lovely Damon, when thou'rt near me,
 Soon as Straight my vital spirits fly;
 And Nothing but thy smiles can cheer me,
 No more Turn, O turn that killing eye:
 But Hide, O hide those blooming graces
 Untouch That thy lovely face adorn:
 And Who could shun thy sweet embraces
 When thou'rt blushing like the morn.

Lovely Damon, do not tease me
 With a sight I cannot bear:
 Dearest Damon, if you'd ease me,
 Never on the plain appear:
 Desist, dear youth, nor strive to gain
 A heart which is not mine to give:
 Cease, O cease to give such pain;
 Shun my sight, and let me live.

Edin. April 10.

Stella.

W. Woods²

3. William Woods' poems and epitaphs.

1. Caledonian Mercury, 9 July 1774.
2. Weekly Magazine, 30 December 1774. This poem is also
 transcrib'd To Mr R. FERGUSSON: On his Recovery. copy of the
 1773 Poems.

And may thy Friends the joyful News believe!
 Dost thou to perfect sense and feeling live?
 Has Pain, Despair, and Melancholy fled,
 That shook their gloomy Horrors round thy Bed?
 Has Reason chac'd the troubles of thy Brain,
 And fix'd her native empire there again?
 Has HEALTH, first bliss! her saving arm inclin'd,
 And giv'n thy Body strength to suit thy Mind?--

Epitaphs

Sommers Yes! it is true--Again I see thee smile;
 Again I view thee in the Muses File,
 (Per) With artless Grace along their Gardens move, ^{asylum, when a}
 And twine wild wreaths, as sportively you rove.-- ^{reached}
 the For all those friends in thy affections join'd. ^{Mr WILLIAM}
 WOODS By Sympathy, by Sentiment refin'd, ^{that at Ayrdown. That}
 Gentl No words can justice to their joy afford, ^{and from the high}
 respo To see a portion of themselves restor'd! ^{eat down, and under}
 the Ev'n Friends unknown--Friends by thy Merit earn'd, ^{wrote the}
 follo Rejoice--while Dulness only's unconcern'd:
 Wit, Sense, and Fancy, all their pow'rs display
 Sacred To celebrate thy second natal day! ^{Who met a Fate/from}
 which the Possession of humbler Talents might have secured him./
 Bless'd So when some River, trembling with the Storm, ^{by'd/both}
 in hi Which sudden does its beauteous face deform, ^{labour, and}
 Bass Its wonted course no longer can maintain, ^{it then, he added}
 noble But bursts its Banks, and sweeps along the plain: ^{as, sincere}
 in hi Soon as the angry whirlwinds cease to roar, ^{a good-humour'd}
 Sati And sunny skies proclaim the Tempest o'er, ^{But, thus}
 adorn No more on stranger shores the surges foam, ^{often obtains}
 Patro But creep in murmurs to their native home; ^{ears the Child}
 of Ne Untaught by Art, their parent waters know, ^{anger to sustain}
 the And once more freely and unruffled flow.-- ^{and limited Means,}
 burst from its narrow Prison/of this World, ^{in, A BETTER.}
 W.1

An earlier version of the epitaph by Woods was printed in The

Epitaph intended for Mr Robert Fergusson

The Mild Nature smil'd upon her sportive Bard; who long lived
 upon the moor But Fortune from her blessings hurl'd-- It has been seen
 by several His spirit madden'd at the lean reward, ^{on, that the character}
 is drawn w/ Burst from its bonds, and left th' ungrateful world!
 imagine it will be an acceptable present to the admirers of ² that young
 Scottish bard to lay it before them. W. Woods

SACRED/To the memory of/ROB. FERGOUSON: Who met/A Fate/From Which/
 The possession of/A lesser Genius/Might have been sufficient/To

1. Caledonian Mercury, 9 July 1774.
 2. Weekly Magazine, 30 December 1774. This poem is also
 transcribed on the Gavin Wilson presentation copy of the
 1773 Poems.
- SACRED/To the memory of/ROB. FERGOUSON: Who met/A Fate/From Which/
 The possession of/A lesser Genius/Might have been sufficient/To
 Bless'd With Nature's most spontaneous Gifts, He was,
 For/Placing without Labour/And/
 Easy/In his manner, open in his address, sincere in his
 attachments, Generous in his Resentments; A good-humoured Satirical
 of Polity, An enthusiastic lover of Merit, But/Thus adorn'd/Wanting/
 That persevering Confidence/Which often obtains/Even Poets/
 Preferments and Honours, To Fortune's lofty Favours/The Child of
 Nature was denied, His/Generous and feeling Soul, Severely wrought
 on, /Insupportably oppress'd/By/Extended Sentiment/And/Mottled Means,
 Burst/From its narrow Prison/of This World, In Hopes to gain A
 BETTER!

Epitaphs

Sommers (pp. 48, 49) relates the following:

[Fergusson] had not been many days in the public asylum, when a report went forth, that he was dead!—That report even reached the ear of his acquaintance, and respectable friend, Mr WILLIAM WOODS of the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, then at Aberdeen. That Gentleman was much affected at the information, and from the high respect which he bore for the bard, instantly sat down, and under the influence of the strong impression then on his mind, wrote the following striking and impressive EPITAPH.

Sacred/To The Memory of/ROBERT FERGUSSON:/Who met a Fate/from which/the Possession of humbler Talents/might have secured him./ Blest/with Nature's most spontaneous Gifts,/he display'd/both in his Poems and his Conversation/Strength without Labour,/and Ease without Affectation:/To these shining Qualities,/he added nobler;/he was/manly in his Manners,/open in his Actions,/sincere in his Attachments,/generous in his Resentments;/a good-humour'd Satirist of Folly,/an enthusiastic Lover of Merit./But, thus adorn'd,/wanting/that persevering Fortitude/which often obtains Patronage from the great,/to Fortune's lofty Favours the Child of Nature was denied./His feeling Soul,/unable longer to sustain/the Impressions made/on enlarged Sensibility, and limited Means,/burst/from its narrow Prison/of this World,/to gain/A BETTER.

An earlier version of the epitaph by Woods was printed in The Caledonian Mercury, 31 December 1777:

The following Epitaph was written by a gentleman, who long lived upon the most friendly intimacy with the deceased. It has been seen by several of his acquaintances, who are of opinion, that the character is drawn with justice, and by no means exaggerated. We therefore imagine it will be an acceptable present to the admirers of that young Scottish bard to lay it before them.

SACRED/To the memory of/ROB. FERGUSSON:/Who met/A Fate/From Which/The possession of/A lesser Genius/Might have been sufficient/To secure him./Blest/With Nature's most spontaneous Gifts,/He was,/Both in his Writings and Conversation,/Pleasing without Labour/And/Easy without Affection:/To which/Shining Qualities,/He added/Nobler;/For/He was/Manly in his Manners,/Open in his Actions,/Sincere in his Attachments,/And/Generous in his Resentments;/A good-humoured Satirist of Folly,/An enthusiastic Lover of Merit./But/Thus adorn'd/Wanting/That persevering Confidence/Which often obtains/Even Fools/Preferments and Honours,/To Fortune's lofty Favours/The Child of Nature was denied./His/Generous and feeling Soul,/Severely wrought on,/Insupportably oppress'd/By/Extended Sentiment/And/Limited Means,/Burst/From its narrow Prison/Of/This World,/In Hopes to gain A BETTER!

4. Epistle to Robert Burns, the Ayrshire Poet. The several stanzas quoted from this poem, which appeared in the Courant of 12 December 1786, form, perhaps, the truest picture of the extent of Fergusson's drinking near the end of 1773. The statements lead us to the conclusion that alcoholism actually had started, but that it was not beyond control.

...

Poor Ferguson! I ken'd him weel,
He was a blythsome canty chiel,
"I've seen him roun' the bickers reel,"*
An' lilt his sang,
An' crack his joke, sae pat an' leal,
Ye'd ne'er thought lang.

O had ye seen, as I hae seen him,
Whan nae Blue Devils† did pervene him,
An' heard the pipe the Lord had gi'en him,
In Scottish air,
Ye'd ablins for an angel ta'n him,
He sang sae rare.

But whan by these d-----d fiends attacket,
His fine-spun saul they hew'd an' hacket,
Your very heart-strings wad hae cracket,
To've seen him than;
He was just like a headless tacket,
In shape o' man.

Eh, Rab, he was like money ane,
Wha get a pund, they'll tak' a stane;
He had a spark frae Phoebus gi'en,
But, ah! wae's wow!
It bleaz'd up like a comet keen,
An' brunt his pow.

...

* His own words, in his Address to his Auld Breiks.

† The Blue Devils was Ferguson's common phrase for the depression of spirits generally consequent to a debauch, and which he suffered in a most dreadful extreme.

4. (p. 66)

APPENDIX M

The next Divine Attribute to consider is the Immenseness of the Knowledge of which as I have said, is drawn from the apparent Immenseness. Underlined Passages in Fergusson's Copy of Gildon's

[If matter is immense, God is not, because he reaches and transcends all matter.] Deist's Manual

1. (p. 35)

If God thus appear in the forming of Animals and the Bodies of Men; how much more will he be seen in the Formation of the Mind? on which he has set the Image of himself, But that you will see when (after I have cleared this Point) I come to consider the Soul in its Nature, and Immortality.

[Previous to this, Gildon had been demonstrating the harmony of the various parts of the body. He is showing that creation proceeds from an intelligent cause.]

2. (p. 43)

It cannot be, therefore, denied, that Some Being may exist more excellent in its Nature, than Man; that is, who has, and possesses Qualities more in Number, and Perfection, than those of which Man is Master.

[This conclusion is reached on the reasoning that creation must be due to something greater than the creation itself: the first man could not have created himself.]

3. (p. 65)

He would rob God of his Immutability, who should assert, that God gained, or lost certain Attributes, or Perfections; or that there were a possibility of his perishing.

[Gildon's answer to the argument that, since God is eternal, there is a succession of time implied, and this in turn implies change.]

4. (p. 66)

APPENDIX N

The next Divine Attribute I shall consider is the Immensity: the Knowledge of which as I have said, is drawn from the apparent Immensity of Matter.

[If matter is immense, God is immense, because he reaches and transcends all matter.] in his study of Fergusson (see

5. (p. 183). The approximate date of composition of each

poem But he will say, the Discovery of a Truth, whether pleasing or displeasing, is a Task worthy a Philosopher.

are only probable are marked with an interrogation point (?) [That is what the skeptic will say to answer the believer in before the title. Poems whose dates and authorship are uncertain are marked with two interrogation points (??). Immediately after the title of each poem appear the facts of the first argument that the philosopher must be certain of his ground before he speaks. Why should Fergusson have underlined the skeptic's edition in which the poem appeared, and any other reprints of interest. The following abbreviations are used: "WM" for Weekly Magazine; "EM" for Edinburgh Magazine; "DM" for Dumfries Weekly Magazine; "SM" for Scots Magazine; "SNM" for Scots not at all apparent.]

Musical Museum; "NYB" for the New York edition of Burns (1783); "1773", "1779", etc., for the collected editions of Fergusson of those dates; and 1851 for Grosart's edition of that year.

Before 1765

? Horace, Ode XI, lib. I. 1775.

1765

April

? Elegy on the Death of Mr. David Gregory, Late Professor of Mathematics in the University of St. Andrews. 1773.

APPENDIX N

Chronological List of Fergusson's Poems

This list is based largely on a similar chronology given by Dr. Allan H. MacLaine in his study of Fergusson (see Bibliography). The approximate date of composition of each poem is given in the left-hand margin. Poems whose dates are only probable are marked with an interrogation point (?) before the title. Poems whose dates and authorship are uncertain are marked with two interrogation points (??). Immediately after the title of each poem appear the facts of the first publication, followed by notations of the first collected edition in which the poem appeared, and any other reprints of interest. The following abbreviations are used: "WM" for Weekly Magazine; "PM" for Perth Magazine; "DWM" for Dumfries Weekly Magazine; "SM" for Scots Magazine; "SMM" for Scots Musical Museum; "NYB" for the New York edition of Burns (1788); "1773", "1779", etc., for the collected editions of Fergusson of those dates; and 1851 for Grosart's edition of that year.

Before 1765

? Horace, Ode XI, Lib. I. 1779.1765

April

? Elegy on the Death of Mr. David Gregory, Late Professor of Mathematics in the University of St. Andrews. 1773.

July

September

October

1769

January

During 1771

1772

January

July

1769-70

April

May

June

1771

January

August

May

July

September

October

A Burlesque Elegy on the Amputation of a Student's Hair, Antecedent to his
WM 21 Nov.

Fourteen (?) songs in the opera The Royal Shepherd published in the libretto at the time of performance (January 1769).
No repose. Neil Stewart's Collection 1772-3. SMM (1788), v. 2. Some of the songs are in Amintas (1769, 1783, 1788, 1792).

Songs in the opera Artaxerxes performed by Tenducci. Libretto July 1769. 1851.

Elegy on the Death of Sista Mesio. WM 1 March, signed. 1773.

? The Rivers of Scotland. An Ode Set to Music by Mr. [John] Collet. 1773. The Nightingale 1776. 1851.

? Ode to Hope. 1773.

? Ode to Pity. 1773.

? Amidst a rosy bank of flowers. Neil Stewart's Collection 1772-3. 1773. The Goldfinch 1777. SMM (1788), v. 2.

? Where winding Forth adorns the vale. Neil Stewart's Collection 1772-3. 1773. The Goldfinch 1777. SMM (1788), v. 2.

? Extempore Verses on Being asked which of three sisters was most beautiful. 1773.

? Auld Reikie, first version.

Pastoral I: Morning. WM 7 Feb., unsigned. 1773.

Pastoral II: Noon. WM 14 Feb., unsigned. 1773.

Pastoral III: Night. WM 21 Feb., unsigned. 1773.

On the Cold Month of April, 1771. WM 16 May, signed. 1773.

A Saturday's Expedition, in Mock Heroics. WM 1 Aug., signed. 1773.

The Decay of Friendship, a Pastoral Elegy. WM 19 Sept., signed. 1773.

Written at the Hermitage of Braid, Near Edinburgh. WM 10 Oct., signed. 1773.

September

November

A Burlesque Elegy on the Amputation of a Student's Hair, Antecedent to his Entering into Orders. WM 21 Nov., signed. 1773.

During 1771

? The Complaint, a Pastoral. 1773.

October

1772

January

The Daft Days. WM 2 Jan., signed. 1773.

February

Fashion, a Poem. WM 27 Feb., signed and dated, "Edin. Feb. 8." 1773.

Before November

March

Elegy on the Death of Scots Music. WM 5 March, signed. 1773.

April

Retirement. WM 2 April, signed. 1773.

November

Extempore, on seeing some stanzas to Mrs Hartley, wherein she is described as resembling Mary Queen of Scots. 1773.

On the Death of Mr Thomas Lancashire, Comedian. WM 16 April, signed. 1773.

Epigram on Thomas Sommers. Sommers' biography of Fergusson. 1803.

May

Conscience, An Elegy. WM 7 May, signed. 1773.

June

The King's Birth-Day in Edinburgh. WM 4 June, signed. 1773.

The Simile: A Pastoral. WM 25 June, signed. 1773.

On the Death of Dr Toshack of Perth, a great humourist. WM 25 June, signed, "R. F-n." 1851.

January

July

Damon to his Friends. A Ballad. WM 16 July, signed. 1773.

February

The Canongate Play-House in Ruins. A Burlesque Poem. WM 30 July, signed. 1773.

March

August

The Peasant, The Hen, and Young Ducks: A Fable. WM 13 Aug., signed and dated, "Edin. Aug. 10, 1772." 1773.

April

To Mr. Guion, Comedian, for his Panegyric on Dr. Walke[r]. WM 20 Aug., initialed. 1851.

Caller Oysters. WM 27 Aug., signed. 1773.

Ode to the Bee. WM 29 April, signed and dated, "Broomhouse, East Lothian, April 26, 1773." 1782. NYNCH.

- September Answer to Mr. J. S.'s Epistle. WM 10 Sept., signed. 1779.
On seeing a Lady paint herself. WM 10 Sept., signed. SM Sept., signed. 1773.
Against Repining at Fortune. WM 24 Sept., signed. 1773.
- October Braid Claith. WM 15 Oct., signed. 1773. NYB88.
An Eclogue to the Memory of Dr. William Wilkie, late Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of St Andrews. WM 29 Oct., signed. 1773.
- Before November Sandie and Willie, An Eclogue. 1773. NYB88.
Town and Country Contrasted, In an Epistle to a Friend. 1773.
A Tale. 1773.
- November Hallow-fair. WM 12 Nov., signed. 1773. NYB88.
Epitaph on General Wolfe. WM 12 Nov., signed. 1779.
Epigram on the Epitaphs for General Wolfe. By the same. WM 12 Nov. 1779.
To the Tron-Kirk Bell. WM 26 Nov., signed. 1779.
- December Good Eating. WM 17 Dec., signed. 1779.
The Delights of Virtue. WM 1 Jan. 1773, signed. 1779.
Character of a Friend, in an Epitaph which he desired the author to write. WM 1 Jan. 1773, signed. PM 26 Feb. 1773, signed. 1779.
- September 1773
- January Caller Water. WM 21 Jan., signed. PM 26 Feb., signed. 1779. NYB88.
- February A Tavern Elegy. WM 18 Feb., signed. 1779.
- March Mutual Complaint of Plainstones and Causey, in their Mother-Tongue. WM 4 March, signed. 1779.
The Rising of the Session. WM 18 March, signed and dated, "Auld Reikie, March 15. 1773." 1779.
- April The Sow of Feeling. WM 8 April, signed. 1779.
Epilogue, spoken by Mr Wilson, at the Theatre-royal, in the Character of an Edinburgh buck. WM 22 April, signed. Courant, 3 May. The Nightingale 1776. 1779. NYB88.
- October Ode to the Bee. WM 29 April, signed and dated, "Broomhouse, East Lothian, April 26. 1773." 1782. NYB88.

- May The Farmer's Ingle. WM 13 May, signed.
PM 21 May, signed. 1779. NYB88.
The Ghaists: A Kirk-Yard Eclogue. WM
 27 May, signed. 1779.
- June The Bugs. WM 10 June, signed. 1782.
To Andrew Gray. PM 2 July, signed and dated,
 "Edinburgh, June 23rd, 1773." 1851.
On Seeing a Butterfly in the Street. WM
 24 June, signed and dated, "Auld Reikie,
 June 21." 1782. NYB88.
- July Hame Content. A Satire. To all whom it
may concern. WM 8 July, signed. 1779.
Leith Races. WM 22 July, signed and dated,
 "Auld Reikie, July 21." 1779.
- August Tea. A Poem. WM 5 Aug., signed and dated,
 "North-Belton, Aug. 2." 1779.
Ode to the Gowdspink. WM 12 Aug., signed
 and dated, "North-Belton, Aug. 9." 1779.
 NYB 88.
An Expedition to Fife and the Island of May,
on board the Blessed Endeavour of Dunbar,
Captain Roxburgh Commander. WM 26 Aug.,
 signed. 1779.
A Mournful Ditty. MS., Edinburgh University.
The Summons. 1851, but not printed as
 Fergusson's. MS., Edinburgh University.
- September To the Principal and Professors of the University
of St Andrews, on their superb treat to Dr Samuel
Johnson. WM 2 Sept., signed and dated, "Edin.
 Sept. 1." Aberdeen Journal, 17 Sept.
The Election. WM 16 Sept., signed and dated,
 "Auld Reikie, Sept. 13." 1779.
On the Music-bells playing yesterday forenoon,
prior to Brown and Wilson's execution, on the
Deacons being presented to Council. WM 16
 Sept., initialed. 1851.
Elegy on John Hogg, late Porter to the University
of St Andrews. WM 23 Sept., signed and dated,
 "Sept. 18." 1779.
Verses on Visiting Dumfries. DWM 28 Sept.,
 signed and dated, "Sept. 26." Spence 1811.
 1851.
- October To Sir John Fielding, on his Attempt to suppress
The Beggar's Opera. WM 7 Oct., signed. 1779.
To the Memory of John Cunningham. Published
 separately 8 Oct. 1773. 1779.

Dates Unknown

1. McManis dates this
 where it first app

- To Dr Samuel Johnson: Food for a new Edition of his Dictionary. WM 21 Oct., signed. 1779. *Probably soon must fade.*
Epigram on seeing Scales used in a Mason Lodge. WM 21 Oct., unsigned. 1779. *Sea.*
- November The Sitting of the Session. WM 4 Nov., signed. PM 12 Nov., signed. 1779.
Epigram, on James Boswell, Esq; and Dr Samuel Johnson being confined to the Isle of Sky. WM 4 Nov., initialed. 1851.
A Drink Eclogue. WM 11 Nov., signed. 1779.
To my Auld Breeks. WM 25 Nov., signed. 1779.
Rob. Fergusson's Last Will. WM 25 Nov., signed. 1779.
Verse Letter to Collector Lorimer. Written by Fergusson 26 November. The Scotsman 7 March 1887. McDiarmid 1954.
- December Codicile to Rob. Fergusson's Last Will. WM 23 Dec., signed. 1779.
- During 1773 Drinking Song. The Nightingale 1776. The Goldfinch 1777.
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 ?? The Lea-Rig. SMM (1787), v. 2. 1851.
 ?? Hallowfair (song). Herd's Collection 1776. SMM (1797), v. 5. 1851.
Extempore by Mr R. Fergusson--on Leith Walk, on hearing some young Lawyers propose to pay a visit to the old Gibbet, then just cut down. WM 2 Feb. 1775. 1779.
Auld Reikie, A Poem. Published separately in the autumn of 1773 as "Canto I" of an intended longer poem.
- Dates Unknown Ode to Disappointment. Probably 1774. 1779.
Job, Chap. III, Paraphrased. Probably 1774. 1779.
Ode to Horror. Probably 1774. 1779.
Dirge.¹ 1773 or 1774. 1779.

1. McDiarmid dates this mid-1773, but he has not as yet indicated where it first appeared.

The Author's Life. Probably 1774. 1779.
Since Brightest Beauty soon must fade.
 Perhaps written as early as 1769. 1779.
On the Author's Intention of Going to Sea.
 1779.

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The Edinburgh

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On Night. Arthur Masson's Collection of
Prose and Verse 1777, 1792. 1851.
Epigram, written extempore, at the desire
of a gentleman who was rather ill-favoured,
but who had a family of beautiful children.
 1779.

On Seeing a Collection of Pictures Painted
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 [Contains Hallowfair.]

Amintas, an English Opera As perform'd at the Theatre-Royal
in Covent-Garden (London M.DCC.LXIX.).
 [Revised version of The Royal Shepherd. Performed December
 1769 by Tenducci.]
 [On p. 102 is Fergusson's drinking song, its first appearance.]

Poems By Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh, Printed by Walter &
 Thomas Ruddiman MDCCLXXIII).
 [Publication date 1772. Copies at the National Library of
 Scotland; Edinburgh University Library; Edinburgh Public
 Library; Library of King's College, Aberdeen; St. Andrews
 University Library; Mitchell Library, Glasgow; Victoria and
 Albert Museum; British Museum; Yale University Library; at
 least two copies in private libraries.]
and Select Collection of the Best Scots and English Songs...
 (Edinburgh 1780).
 [Another edition in 1789.]

Various Subjects, by Robert Fergusson. Part II

A Collection of Scots Songs Adapted for a Voice and Harpsichord
Edinburgh Printed and Sold by Neil Stewart at his Shop Millns
[sic] Square Opposite to the Tron Church (Edinburgh [1772-3]).

Auld Reikie, A Poem, By R. Fergusson. (Edinburgh: Printed
 for the Author; and Sold at Ossian's Head. MDCCLXXIII [Price
 Six Pence.]).
 [Copies at the British Museum and Harvard University Library.]

Goldfinch or New Modern Songster (Glasgow n.d. [c. 1780]).

A Poem to the Memory of John Cunningham, By R. Fergusson
 (Edinburgh: Printed by Alexr. Kincaid, His Majesty's Printer;
 and Sold at Ossian's Head. MDCCLXXIII. [Price Six Pence.]).
 [Copies at British Museum and National Library of Scotland.]

The Caledoniad, A Collection of Poems written chiefly by
Scottish Authors, 3 v. (London MDCCLXXV).
 [Poems by Fergusson are contained in v. 2,3.]

A Collection of Scots Songs adapted for a Voice and Harpsichord,
Edinburgh, Printed and sold by Neil Stewart [ed.] at his Shop
Parliament [sic] Square (Edinburgh [1775-1780]).

 [Herd, David, ed.]

Ancient And Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads, Etc. Collected
From Memory, Tradition, and Ancient Authors (Edinburgh MDCCLXXVI).
 [Contains Hallowfair.]

The Nightingale: A Collection of Ancient and Modern Songs,
Scots and English... To which is added The Edinburgh Buck: An
Epilogue written by Mr. R. Fergusson. (Edinburgh MDCCLXXVI).
 [On p. 102 is Fergusson's drinking song, its first appearance.]

The Goldfinch A Choice Collection of the most celebrated Songs...
To which is added the Edinburgh Buck: An Epilogue, written by
Mr. R. Fergusson (Edinburgh 1777).

 [Murray, James, ed. and printer]

The Scots Nightingale: or Edinburgh Vocal Miscellany, A New
and Select Collection of the Best Scots and English Songs...
(Edinburgh M.DCC.LXXVIII).
 [Another edition in 1789.]

Poems On Various Subjects, by Robert Fergusson. Part II
 (Edinburgh: Printed by Walter and Thomas Ruddiman. M,DCC,LXXIX.).
 [Separate copies at Edinburgh University and King's College,
 Aberdeen, but usually bound with 1773 Poems.]

Thirty Scots Songs adapted for a Voice and Harpsichord The
Words by Allan Ramsay Printed and sold by N[eil] Stewart
Parliament Square (Edinburgh [c. 1780]).

The Goldfinch or New Modern Songster (Glasgow n.d. [c. 1780]).

Poems On Various Subjects, By Robert Fergusson. In Two Parts.
 The Second Edition. (Edinburgh M,DCC,LXXXII).
 [Two issues; the first published August 1781 and advertised
 in the Courant, 15 August 1781.]

The Goldfinch, or New Modern Songster (Edinburgh 1782).
Words by Allan Ramsay Edinburgh Printed and Sold by N.
Garrick, David] 12 South Bridge Street (Edinburgh [c. 1793]).
Bucks, have at ye All; Or, The picture of a Play-house (Edinburgh
 1783).
 [Contains The Edinburgh Buck.]

Poems on Various Subjects by Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1796).
 M,DCC,LXXXV).

Poems On Various Subjects By Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh:
 Printed by T. Ruddiman and Co. For J. Simpson at the Cross.
 M,DCC,LXXXV).

The Scots Musical Museum, 6 v. (Edinburgh 1787-1803), v. I
 (1787), v. II (1788), v. V (1797).

Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect. By Robert Burns. To
which are added, Scots Poems, Selected From the Works Of Robert
Fergusson (New-York M,DCC,LXXXVIII).
 Author (Glasgow 1800).

Poems On Various Subjects By R. Fergusson (R. Morison, Perth
 M,DCC,LXXXVIII).

Same as above. Large and Thick Paper edition.

Same as above. M,DCC,LXXXIX.

Same as above. Large and Thick Paper edition.

[Hill, Peter]

Sale Catalogue for 1793 lists a 1790 edition of Fergusson's works.

Masson, Arthur, ed.

A Collection of Prose and Verse From the Best English Authors
For the Use of Schools (Perth M,DCC,XCII.).

[1777 edition with Fergusson's Night not located.]

Thirty Scots Songs Adapted for a Voice and Harpsichord The
Words by Allan Ramsay Edinburgh Printed and Sold by N.
Stewart & Co. No. 37 South Bridge Street (Edinburgh [c. 1795]).

The Ghaists: A Kirk-Yard Eclogue. By Robert Fergusson
(Paisley 1796).

Poems on Various Subjects By Robert Fergusson (Paisley 1796).

The Farmers Ingle by Robert Fergusson to which is added
Poetical Reveries on Seeing Children at Play And An Epigram
(Glasgow [1797]).

Poems On Various Subjects By Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh
M,DCC,XCIX.).

The Poetical Works of R. Fergusson (Paisley 1799).

Irving, David, ed.

The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson, With the Life of The
Author (Glasgow 1800).

Poems on Various Subjects by R. Fergusson with a life of the Author (St. Andrew's 1800).

The Works of Robert Fergusson; with A Short Account of His Life (W. & J. Deas, Edinburgh 1805).

The Poems of Robert Fergusson. to which is prefixed a short Sketch of the Author's Life (Edinburgh 1806).

[Peterkin, Alexander, ed.]

The Works of Robert Fergusson To Which Is Prefixed, A Sketch Of The Author's Life (London 1807).

Same as above. Printed for W. Blackwood, South Bridge Street (London 1807).

The Daft Days, The King's Birth-Day In Edinburgh, and Braid Claith By Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1808).

The Farmer's Ha' By Dr. Charles Keith. With the Farmer's Ingle. By Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1808).

Bannington, James, ed.

The Poems of Robert Fergusson: In two Parts to which are prefixed A Sketch of the Author's Life, And a cursory view of his writings (London 1809).

[Peterkin, Alexander, ed.]

The Works of Robert Fergusson. to which is prefixed, A Sketch of the Author's Life (Greenock 1810).

Spence, Elizabeth Isabella

Sketches of the Present Manners, Customs, and Scenery of Scotland, 2 v. (London 1811).

[V. 2 contains, in the appendix, Verses on Dumfries.]

The Poetical Works of Robert Ferguson with his life, 2v.
 (Alnwick [1812]).
 [Life by Peterkin. This was printed a number of times until
 about 1820. Certain copies bear dates 1812, 1813, and 1816.]

 Gilchrist, John, ed.
A Collection of Scottish Ballads, Tales, and Songs, ancient
 and modern, 2 v. (Leith 1814).
 [Later editions 1815 and 1865.]

The Poems of Robert Fergusson: In Two Parts. To which is
 prefixed, The Life of the Author, and a Sketch of his
 Writings (Philadelphia 1815).

 Campbell, Thomas, ed.
Specimens of the British Poets (London 1819), v. IV.

The British Poets (Philadelphia 1819-1823), v. 37.
 [Copy in Library of Congress.]

 Gray, James, ed.
The Poems of Robert Fergusson. with A Life of the Author,
 And Remarks on his genius and writings (London 1821).

 Same as above. Large Paper edition.

The Works of Robert Fergusson; with An Account of his Life
 (London 1821).
 [Also two other issues of this.]

The Works of Robert Fergusson; with an Account of his Life
 (Paisley 1825).

The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson. with a memoir of
 the author, And notes illustrating local and personal
 allusions (Edinburgh 1840).
 [There were two issues, one of which has on reverse of title:
 Edinburgh: printed by W. & R. Chambers.]

The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson (Select Scottish Poets, no. 6) (Belfast MDCCCXLVI).
 Introduction (1851)

 [Grosart, Alexander Balloch]

The Works of Robert Fergusson edited, with life of the author and an essay on his genius and writings, by A. B. G. (London, Edinburgh, and Dublin 1851).

[Grosart's edition appeared 1851, 1857, 1862, and 1879 in various issues.]

 Mackay, Charles, ed.

The Poetical Works of Allan Ramsay. With Selections From The Scottish Poets Before Burns (London [1866-68]).

The Poetical Works Of Robert Fergusson With a Memoir of the Author And Notes Illustrating Local And Personal Allusions (London and Edinburgh 1871).

Archaeologia Scotica or, Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (Edinburgh MDCCCXC), v. V.

[Contains biography of James Cummyng and a printing of Fergusson's The Antiquary.]
 Sketch (Edinburgh 1895)

 Aitkin, Robert, ed.

The Poems of Robert Fergusson To which prefixed a Sketch of the Author's Life (Edinburgh 1895).

[Several issues.]

 Eyre-Todd, George, ed.

Scottish Poetry of the Eighteenth Century, 2 v. (Glasgow 1896), v. 2.

[Contains an account of Fergusson.]
 Glasgow Burns Centenary Edition (Glasgow 1925)

The Farmer's Ingle and Other Poems. by Robert Fergusson (The Scots Classics Reprints, no. 1) (Aberdeen MDCCCXCVIII).

3 v. (Edinburgh 1891, v. 1)

 Hecht, Hans, ed.

Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts (Edinburgh MCMIV).

[First appearance of the Cape Song.]
 Britain and Ireland, 2 v. (London 1914, v. 1)

[A bibliography containing mention of Ande Bards (1851), p. 681.]

 Ford, Robert, ed.

The Poetical Works of Robert Fergusson With Biographical Introduction (Paisley 1905).

[Later issues in 1908, 1915, etc.]

Scottish Vernacular Literature, a succinct history (Edinburgh 1910).

 Aitkin, Robert, ed.

The Poems of Robert Fergusson With a Sketch of the Author's Life (Edinburgh [1905]).

Scots Poems By Robert Fergusson Illustrated by Monro S. Orr (Edinburgh 1911).

[Three issues in all, one of them in 1913.]

 Dickens, Bruce, ed.

Scots Poems by Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1925).

 Law, Alexander, ed.

Scots Poems by Robert Fergusson (Edinburgh 1947).

 Telfer, John, ed.

The Scots Poems of Robert Fergusson Edited with biographical Sketch (Edinburgh 1948).

A Literary History of Scotland (London 1903).

 McDiarmid, Matthew P., ed.

The Poems of Robert Fergusson (Scottish Text Society, Edinburgh 1954), v. I.

[The following is arranged alphabetically.]

Glasgow Burns Centenary Exhibition Catalogue (Glasgow 1896).

 Gleig, George

Supplement to the Third Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 3 v. (Edinburgh 1801), v. II.

 [Gough, Richard]

British Topography or an Historical Account of what has been done for illustrating the Topographical Antiquities of Great Britain and Ireland, 2 v. (London MDCCLXXX).

[A bibliography containing mention of Auld Reikie (v. 2, p. 683).]

Scottish Poems, never before in print but now published from the MS. collections of Sir Richard Maitland... prefixed are an essay on the origin of Scottish poetry, a list of all the Scottish poets, with brief remarks..., 2 v. (London M.DCC.LXXXVI.).

Green, Frederick C.
Robert Fergussons Anteil an der Literatur Schottlands
 (Heidelberg 1923).

Henderson, T. F.
Scottish Vernacular Literature, a succinct history (Edinburgh 1910).

Holmes, D. T.
French Essays of British Poets (Glasgow, 1902).
 ["Robert Fergusson: son oeuvres et son influence."]

Irving, David
The Life of Robert Fergusson with a Critique on his Works
 (Glasgow 1799).
 [Portrait is dated 1800.]

The Lives of the Scottish Poets, 3 v. (Glasgow 1804), v. II.

MacArthur, Henry
Realism and Romance and Other Essays (Edinburgh 1897).

Mayne, John
The Siller Gun: a poem, in four cantos (Gloucester 1808).
 [There are a number of variant texts: Glasgow 1783, London 1836, etc. There is a reference to Fergusson in the poem.]

Miller, J. H.
A Literary History of Scotland (London 1903).

Mitchell, Arthur
Memorandum...on the Position of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum for the Insane (Edinburgh 1883).

Molenaar, Dr. Heinrich
Robert Burns' [sic] Beziehungen zur Litteratur (Erlangen & Leipzig 1899).

Murray, John, ed.
Essays in Literature (Edinburgh and London 1936).
 [Oliver, John W., "Fergusson, the Writer Chiel."]

Picken, E. and Wilson, A.
The Laurel Disputed; or, The Merits of Allan Ramsay and Robert Ferguson Contrasted; In two poetical Essays, Delivered in the Pantheon at Edinburgh, on Thursday April 14th 1791
 (Edinburgh 1791).

[Pinkerton, John]
Ancient Scottish Poems, never before in print but now published from the MS. collections of Sir Richard Maitland...prefixed are an essay on the origin of Scottish poetry, a list of all the Scottish poets, with brief remarks..., 2 v. (London M.DCC.LXXXVI.).

Haliburton, Hugh (pseudonym of Robertson, John Logie)
For Pair Auld Scotland's Sake (London 1887).

Rogers, Charles
A Century of Scottish Life (Edinburgh 1871).

Roughead, William
Riddle of the Ruthvens (Edinburgh 1919).
 ["A Note on Robert Fergusson."]

Smith, Rev. James
Genealogies of an Aberdeen Family 1540-1913 (Aberdeen University Studies, no. 63, Aberdeen 1913).
 [Inaccurate.]

Smith, Sydney Goodsir, ed.
Robert Fergusson 1750-1774, Essays by Various Hands to Commemorate the Bicentenary of his birth (Edinburgh 1952).

Sommers, Thomas
The Life of Robert Fergusson, The Scottish Poet (Edinburgh 1803).

Thompson, Harold William, ed.
The Anecdotes and Egotisms of Henry MacKenzie 1745-1831
 (London 1927).

Walker, Hugh
Three Centuries of Scottish Literature, 2 v. (Glasgow 1893), v. 2.

Watt, Lauchlan MacLean
Scottish Life and Poetry (London 1912).

[Wilson, Alexander]
The Laurel Disputet, or, The Merits O Ramsay an Ferguson
Compairit: A Poem by Alexander Wilson (Glasgow 1816).